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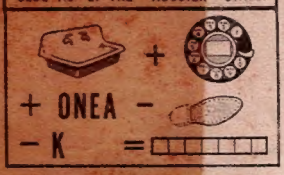
How To Solve SAMPLE PUZZLE

CLUE No. 1: THE "HOOSIER" STATE.



You will see there are a SINK, a DIAL, the SOLE of a shoe and various letters of the alphabet. There are two plus and two minus signs. It is necessary to add and subtract the names and letters as shown by the plus and minus signs. First, write down SINK. Then, add DIAL to it. Next, add ONEA. All this equals SINKDIALONEA. Now, you must subtract the letters in SOLE and K. When this is done you are left with INDIANA. Indiana is the Hoosier State, so the result checks with Clue No. 1.

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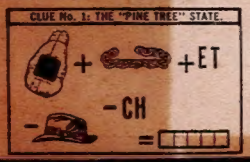

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FAMOUS WESTERN

TEN COMPLETE STORIES

Volume 14 April, 1953 Number 2

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Gordon is sure that this old outlaw will show a yellow streak . . .

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The pandamonium started when Digger tossed a skunk into the saloon . . .

STACKED DECK (Feature Novelet) ..... D. L. Bonar 40
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That Wilcox gal was a looker, all right — and a prelude to trouble!

Next Issue On Sale April 1st

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ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

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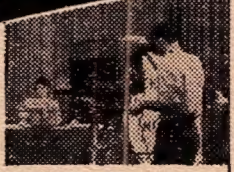

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A Deparment For Western Story Readers

By Harold Gluck

THE SHOT THAT MISSED

THE MAN on horseback was well aware that every eye in Morton City was watching him as he rode through the muddy main street of the town. He wore no hat; his dark shirt was open at the neck; and you could see his U. S. Marshal's badge. In back of him were seven Kutchin Indians, all well-armed, and they sat on their horses as though they were part of the animals. The group stopped in front of Sheriff George Minnaker's office, and the man dismounted. He signaled to the Indians to remain on their horses, then opened the door without the formality of a needless knock.

"Hello, sheriff," was his simple greeting. "Just passing through the town and thought I would let you know I am still alive."

George Minnaker jumped as though he had seen a ghost; for, by all rules

[*Turn To Page* 8]

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of the game, John Warren should have been dead and in a grave with his wife and son.

"I'm alive," he continued speaking as though he read the other man's mind. "Bringing some Indians back to the reservation. Hope you don't mind me passing through your town. Won't be any trouble, unless..."

"Unless you try to get Jed Halber and his boys," finished the sheriff. "Guess you got every right in the world to want revenge. He ran you off your homestead, and killed your wife and kid in the fighting."

"A little late to see my side of the story," snapped back John Warren. "I have warrants for the arrest of Jed Halber and his murdering gang. Just stay on the sidelines while I take care of some killers. In case you want to interfere, remember I have some Kutchins with me and they are itching to add to their scalp-collection."

THE CAFE wasn't too crowded as John Warren entered it; he was well aware that he was walking into a trap. Around his waist was a belt without any holsters. His gun-arrangement was unique: there were slots on each side of that belt, and a pin-attachment kept each gun in place. It would be possible to shoot those guns without drawing them, just as one shoots out of an open-toed swivel holster. But the guns themselves were something never seen by any man in that cafe.

Jed knew that everything was set for the kill. He stood at the opposite end of the bar. One of his men, Mike, was wearing a wide-brimmed hat. He removed the hat and began to fan himself.

"It is a warm day, Marshal," said Mike as he felt he was distracting the attention of the man. "Have a drink with me."

John Warren turned his body half way towards the bar. In that instant Mike went for his gun, which was concealed. But one of those two peculiar guns spoke its message of death quickly. Then John came right to the point as he held his two guns at the group.

"Each one of these revolvers carries twenty bullets; that means I have exactly thirty-nine more left. If any of you want to die, or are crazy enough to try to shoot it out with me, then try it. I have warrants for the arrest of Jed Halber and seven others right in front of me now. You can come peacefully and know you will get a fair trial."

To the side of the marshal there was a small balcony leading to a room; on that balcony was a trunk and behind it was a man taking careful aim at the marshal with a rifle. There was but one shot. The man fell dead to the floor and the rifle slid out of his hand.

"Maybe those are wonder guns you got," uttered the familiar voice of the sheriff, "but you haven't got eyes in the back of your head. Accept my contribution to the cleaning up of Morton City."

The prisoners were securely tied to their horses and flanked on all sides by the Kutchin Indians. The town was thoroughly subdued. The sheriff rode with the party several miles beyond the limits of the town. Then he pulled his revolver from his holster. He flipped a half dollar into the air and hit it on the fly. Up went another coin with the same result.

"Try those trick guns of yours and see if you can do the same," he advised.

John Warren threw a coin with his right hand and pulled the trigger of the gun in his left hand. Nothing happened. Then he threw a coin with his left hand and pulled the trigger of the gun in his right hand. Same result, nothing happened. Then for the first time he laughed.

"I guess it was sort of handy to have you around with your gun when I was in the cafe."

Question: Can you spot the big er-

[*Turn To Page* 86]

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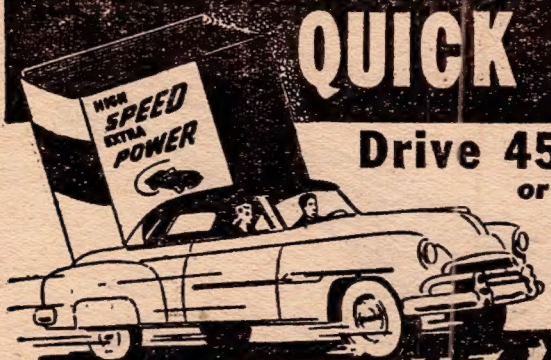

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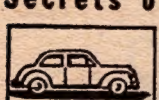

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Gordon rode on grimly, as Wirt staggered along beside him.

RIDE OUT TO DOOM

Feature Novel Of Bitter Awakening

It meant nothing to Gordon that Wirt was an older man; that he'd ridden hard and far before going out into the desert, whence few had returned sane, if alive. No, Wirt's signs of weakness now were due to the fact that he was an outlaw, and all outlaws were yellow...

By T. C. McClary

GORDON stood on the edge of the simmering trail, glaring out of red-rimmed eyes into the desert firepit. His teeth were set with hell's own anger, and his square hewn face was drawn hard as rock.

Nobody but a man desperate with fear, or loco from thirst, would head out into that sea of killing heat; nothing could live on that desert for a day. Not a lizard, not a rattlesnake. Only once in Gordon's memory had any man crossed that desert, and that man was fresh-watered, fresh-mounted, with a mule, in the spring of the year.

Wirt was mounted on a gaunted, laming horse, and thirsty. But he was not loco from thirst, or it would have showed in sign of his futile digging at the choked up, bone-dry waterhole in the boulder nest behind Gordon. He must know Gordon had survived and found another pony after the gory

rustler ambush. Wirt would then know, that Gordon would overtake him on the Largo trail, and haul him, cringing, to a craven end upon the gallows.

Gordon told himself that fear alone had driven the outlaw to the desert's recourse. He felt a savage satisfaction at this fresh evidence that, stripped of their hardcase, all outlaws were yellow. He could picture Wirt already bawling, crawling. It would be justice to let him go mad out there, let him simmer his lonesome, guilty way to hades.

But there was Gordon's boast to the sheriff, and to the town, that he'd bring Wirt in, dead or alive...alive if the outlaw didn't conk out with sheer gutlessness and self-pity.

More important, there was Gordon's own hatred of the breed and his record of never having failed to bring in a living outlaw. Wirt would die out there by this time tomorrow, and Gordon could come back with a water-wagon and remuda, and collect the mess the buzzards left of him. But this was beneath the lawman's pride.

Then, maybe, Dixie had something to do with it. She'd stood up for Wirt —not excused him, but claimed he had his good points. Wirt had been courteous to her; he'd never let his toughs lord it in her *Dixie Eats;* he'd saved her pony once from a cloudburst flood-head. He'd always fought fair and square, she claimed.

Gordon, however, wouldn't concede a point in the outlaw's favor. He couldn't; he had long since locked himself behind a wall of scathing contempt and hate. Nothing about any outlaw was any good at any time, he'd rasped at Dixie. They were all sneaking, vicious, gutless, rotten at their core.

He thought Dixie cried in sympathy for Wirt; he wanted to show her this hombre broken, and make her see just how she'd been taken in. It never penetrated him that her tears had nothing to do with Wirt, that she cried over what Gordon's unyielding, rigid hate was doing to crowd the good and gentle things out of him.

He turned back to the dryhole and went over the sign again. He figured the time Wirt was ahead of him, and how fast his pony was laming. He moved to his canteen and judged the water in it accurately. He had thirty miles of bone-dry trail over the barren, sterile hills ahead; and just about enough water to make it if his horse held out—which it wouldn't. At best, and alone, he'd have a tough pull getting in.

It was only nine miles by desert into Largo, but that was nine miles of pure hell a sane man wouldn't try. Just an hour in that desert would leech the strength clean out of him. They'd found a man once who'd circled in with a full canteen. He'd been on the desert three hours, and he came out scorched as a charred steak, and raving.

It stood to reason that an already dry man riding a laming pony couldn't get far in. Except for the blasting glare of heat, Gordon could probably have seen the outlaw. He could ride in and bring Wirt out. How they'd get to Largo, Gordon didn't know, but he would get Wirt there if he had to drag him.

Gordon had just one shot left, but that thought didn't faze him. Wirt was on the run, his brass front gone, his gang stripped from him, fear corroding through him with nerve-eating acids. He'd come whining, pleading just at sight of Gordon; Wirt's breed had no real iron of courage.

Gordon figured it was a damned fool thing to do, but there were times when a man took a damn fool chance, or his pride would crack and never again serve him. In any case, it was something he had to do simply because he was Gordon. Even in death, he couldn't let an outlaw hold contempt for him.

HE SWUNG into leather. He wet his mouth, no more, from his canteen. Gordon didn't chew tobacco; he

had always considered it a dirty habit and sign of weakness. A man who couldn't get along without slopping himself up with stimulants would be no man in the pinch that fate always applied to test him.

He spoke to his horse and put it moving down grade into the desert furnace. The pony had been gaunted badly in the rustler chase, and it was not much of an animal to begin with. But Gordon's own mount had been shot under him, and this was the only one he'd been able to catch. He'd hiked a good ten miles just getting his hands on this critter.

The heat broke up out of the desert and blasted him with solid impact. The light turned dazzling, whitehot, gobbling all horizon. Glare stripped the land of every shred of color and third dimension; there was not enough shadow or depth to cut clear sign on the tracks ahead. The land that he could make out through the writhing heat and glare looked flat. He would be climbing before he knew he had a hill to climb. His horse would stumble down into declines it had not seen or sensed.

This was only the pitch down into the desert. The floor of the desert was a writhing hell of blazing heat, and glare that seared the eyeballs, and lifeless, burned-out airs. A man sucked for breath and had not caught enough to keep his body going when he was already sucking in another. All through his body, his muscles began to go sore and taut and strengthless. His heart knocked like a trip-hammer, and there was a crazing, persistent buzzing in his head.

Gordon travelled a mile, an hour, an eternity...time and distance had no meaning in the vast brooding silence of the desert. He was range-bred, but not desert-bred; and the dead, leeching heat—and vicious glare, and throttling silence—of the place were hard on him. His lungs were leaden; his heart exploding; and something in the penetrating loneliness was hackling the short hairs upon his back.

He might have passed the dead horse in the maize of sandstone mounds, except that his gaunting, wearing pony came to life and shied and snorted. The brilliance of the burning light pressed out the dead animal's contour. It pressed the pony's outline into the background flat as a postage stamp.

Gordon swung over to it, tearing his senses free of the numbing dullness that was hardening around his mind. He could see the pockmarks of the pony's prints; but the glare was too harsh, too beating, to permit the cutting of clear sign. He would have to get down and study the prints in the shadow of his hat; he sat there debating the effort against his weariness.

Gordon snapped suddenly alert, with outrage and anger at himself for this unconscious weakness. He was a man who had held the cost of effort in disdain all his life; he had done anything that should be done, at any cost, right then without thinking. Yet he had just debated this effort and it was a whiplash on his self-respect that he could have such weakness in him—even under the strength leeching impact of the heat, and a man's body-instinct to save every possible exertion.

Gordon knuckled up his hat to rest his forehead and the trapped sweat in the hatband seeped down and cut rivulets through the dust—film lining his grim, rock-hewn face. The scant change of shade was like a wave of water smashing on his vision; he could barely see at all for that instant.

HIS MUSCLES were already in movement to swing down. He had lifted and shifted his weight. The rusty command came at him, "Jist sit tight there, Gordon! I been expecting you along."

Gordon dropped his body like a sack to the side of his horse. His movements were instinctive; he went over the side, catching balance and reaching for

his gun. He landed, hunkered, behind his pony's legs. His gun was out and cocked on his last bullet.

The voice raised on its rusty, metallic note with callous warning in it. "Reach high, friend, or I'll blow you to kingdom come!"

"Wirt!" Gordon gritted through his teeth. "Where in hell are you, you yellow, murdering coyote?"

"Near enough to mark you through this snakedance glare!" the outlaw responded. "But jist take it easy, mister. There is something bigger than us out here."

Gordon saw him then, a gaunted, dangerous, old lobo of a figure half-protected by a pothole in the side of the brown sandstone mound. Like the pony, the glare flattened him right into the drab color. Gordon, himself, was in clearer view, with nothing but the writhing heat behind him. The outlaw's figure danced—even at this short space—first one side then the other; then up; then down. Gordon could have put a pattern of shots around him, but it was difficult to estimate the other's position accurately enough to risk his last remaining shot.

The deputy's jaw's set with surprise and anger that a sneaking, bushwhacking, gutless snake like this one could still be going, could still command cool thought and tone. But there was the outlaw's recognition of the fact that he had expected Gordon to follow; he knew a real man was on his tail, and this cool talk was the wind of a man with the drop and the false courage of his position. But it was damned odd, Gordon thought, that Wirt hadn't cold shot him.

Gordon's vision was adjusting to the glare again and he had the faint shadow of his horse to break the slashing light that ricochetted off the blazing sands. He switched a glance back to Wirt's pony, lying head on. It was clear from the way the animal was stiffening that it had gone down in a spasm. For all that it could not have lasted long, there was a hole in the front of its brain-box; Wirt had shot it, putting it out of misery.

With another man, Gordon might have had respect for actions; but in the outlaw's case, it was clear Wirt could not stand the pony's thrashing and the sight of suffering and death that he might shortly have to face himself. It sparked up Gordon's contempt for the breed, and balanced up his surprise that Wirt had not been snivelling. But more immediately important, it showed that the old wolverine had bullets left.

Why, then, hadn't Wirt taken his chance to blast the deputy? Maybe he'd been dozy. But Gordon decided that it was pure lack of guts. This way, at least he had not drawn the deputy's fire. It might give him a few extra hours for self-pity and figuring out a drooling, sentimental end.

The worse they came, the more they wanted to leave a sentimental picture that they'd just been wild boys—actually good-hearted and brave and misunderstood. If you wanted sentimental slaver, outlaws were top hands at it. They'd stake a man over an ant-hill to make him talk, but give them a song of the woman they'd run out on somewhere along the line, and they'd bust out blubbering like babies.

GORDON scrabbled a half step under his horse and put his slitted glare up at the old sidewinder. "I came to haul you out of here; I mean to," he declared.

The old man gave a snag-toothed grin. "Purty tough, ain'tcha, Gordon? And squattin' down here figurin' you've evened up the drop I had on you."

"You sure ain't shooting!" the deputy growled. "I've got a reason not to if I can take yore worthless hide without it. But you ain't been taken with piety so much you'll let the Law pass without a shot if you had the guts to do it!"

"Now now, jist be civil and save yore breath," Wirt told him. "I've got my reasons and they ain't pious. Mebbe you don't know this desert. Yore in here deeper than you think; you've been coming all done grade."

Gordon frowned. "What's that cut? You need a horse and you need me a damned sight deader than I am."

"No," Wirt said, and choked for thirst and he had to ease his loose-fleshed throat to continue. "No, that ain't quite how it is. Way that hoss of yore's was lurching; there's no use figuring it would get a man back on trail, like you know. But there's water out here, if a man was spray enough to get it. And yore knees and shoulders got a few years advantage on me, law-dog."

The baking heat was unbearable down that near the ground. Gordon backed, and came up cautiously beyond his pony. He wouldn't trust a damn thing an outlaw claimed. But this might be true; it tugged at memories of tales most folk just passed off as a tall story. There wasn't reason enough for honest men ever to look this desert over, thoroughly; it could be true that there was a secret water-hole, somewhere.

Gordon tried to sense out the quality of light and heat and judge the length of time he'd been upon the desert. It would mean little in any case, he figured. Haze and glare boxed a man in and closed out every vestige of landscape. He had no means of judging whether he'd gone a thousand yards or a hundred feet.

The old outlaw read him. He gave his wicked grin. "Yore three miles out, but it would be like thirty climbing back out of here," he rattled. "There's water a mile ahead if you know where to look. You can cut straight across to Largo if you know how to get there."

Gordon gave a blasting snort of breath. "Whatever trick you've got in mind, it wouldn't work! Mebbe you figure you can pull a sneak or mebbe that I'll turn soft and let you crawl into some malpais snakehole. But you'd be afoot and wouldn't have the guts to crawl back out in any case!"

The outlaw waggled his head, and under the thirst-rust, his voice turned quiet and mocking. "*You* turn soft, Gordon? You wouldn't dast! You'd be afraid if you got to thinking like a human being, you'd see yore boss for what he is...a damned bloodthirsty killer, hiding behind his star and Law."

"That's enough of that!" Gordon blazed. "He's one sheriff has thrown the fear of hell into you gila monsters, and no odds ever turned him back!"

"And you aim to be jist like him?" Wirt cackled. "Well, boy, you may end up dead, or mighty proud of yoreself; but it better be one or the other, for no man will stand wet-eyed at yore funeral." He seemed to think on that, and then he added, "No man—and no woman, either, Gordon; not even a mother would be sorry for the ending of a man like yore boss."

Gordon's jaws tightened, but he was no fool, and both of them had used this little interchange as cover for their thinking. He snapped now, "You'll tell him that yoreself when I haul you in slobbering! Right now, you toss yore gun down and we'll talk about this water."

Wirt shook his head. "No sabe. I have a better idea. I figure the weight's too much to tote and it looks like we've got no use for guns, and so we both cache 'em right here together."

"You've got a sneaker!" Gordon challenged.

The old grey wolf cackled. "Toting that extra weight on a dying hoss through desert? Hell, I even threw off my saddlebags and chaps back yonder."

Gordon hadn't seen them, but it made sense; Wirt didn't have them. He thought a minute, and then his arrogance made up his mind for him. Even if Wirt was lying about his reason for peace and piety, somehow, the outlaw needed Gordon.

He nodded. "Chuck yore gun down then and I'll match it."

"I'll take yore word because yore that thick stubborn," Wirt said. "But I want a word added to it. I want a gun and ten yards on you if we get out of here. When you came in range, that was about ten yards I had."

"Big talk. You'd crawl up to the jail whimpering jist for water and a place to rest!" Gordon growled. He thought the offer over. It wasn't regular; he had the squeamish feeling that the sheriff's eyes would light with utter derision if he knew about it. But he was sure he'd walk the hard front off this jasper. He'd crack him, break him, destroy him in the stench of his own vicious, whimpering yellow guts. So why not?

"Deal," he bit out with contempt.

2

WIRT'S GUN hit and bounced on the hardpan in front of the lawman. Gordon tossed his own. He stood out from his pony, pausing an instant to see just how much conniving there was in the outlaw. He half expected a shot, was half sure none would come.

None came; Gordon tossed his head and felt fresh scorn all through him. Wirt didn't have the guts left to pull a trick, even had he wanted. That was the deputy's opinion as the outlaw's boots grated on the dome-shaped side of the sandstone.

Wirt was a small man, as outlaws ran, but wiry as a whip and tough-fibered as oak. He had the eyes of a snake and face of a hawk. A lifetime of longriding had trimmed him lean as rawhide. Over his frame, his dark brown skin folded like old leather.

Gordon might have considered that Wirt was not of the town breed of outlaws; he was more at home on range and desert than most ranchers. But an outlaw was an outlaw to the deputy—all vicious; all rotten; all cowards when cornered. It was not their wickedness as much as their weakness that he hated. Men weak in one thing were weak straight through to the core, with no possible balancing good, in his opinion. They needed stamping out and he meant to stamp them.

He cached the guns and contemplated Wirt. The other was parched, and Gordon knew it; and he waited for the outlaw to whine for water. But Wirt just looked at him, with mockery threading his hard, bright gaze.

"You'll walk and wait for yore own water!" Gordon barked finally. He was irritated that no crack had yet showed in Wirt's false armor.

Wirt reached slowly and carefully to his hip pocket and snagged out a chew. "Manna in the desert!" he allowed.

Gordon looked at him with contempt. He started to swing up into leather. The outlaw stared at him a moment before he asked, "You riding?"

Gordon let go a blasting snort of breath. "Think I brought this saddle and hoss out to you special?"

"No," the outlaw muttered. "But you are going to wish you hadn't."

Gordon gave a disdainful grunt and Wirt grabbed hold of a stirrup. They started forward, the outlaw moving alongside with the spraddling gait of a man being towed.

Heat blazed down on them out of the molten, brassy sky, heat slashed up from hardpan, sands, and blinding mica stones. Heat shimmered around them in a whitehot, writhing, enervating sea; and turned the sweat creases of their bodies raw; and turned their flesh almost black on those portions beyond their clothes. Heat turned their blood thick, and seared their lungs and got inside their heads, numbing their brains so that they did not know whether they were awake or dozed. Once Wirt toppled and sprawled out,

being sound asleep while he was walking.

Gordon's pony began to lame and the open thrushes of its hooves turned instantly tender, and soon, too raw for it to walk. Gordon swung down and they tried to drive the beast, but shortly that was of no use. He stood there cursing behind the grim containment of his mouth. "If you've got a sneaker gun on you, shoot the pore critter!" he rasped.

The outlaw's mouth split the dust coat of his face in a hideous grin. "I had one shot left after I killed my hoss," he grunted. "Same as you, Gordon, I will bet."

The deputy threw him a glare, and his teeth set edge to edge. He had been sentimental about horseflesh as a boy. He put his fretting down to not being intentionally brutal, now; but it wore on him that he could not put the animal out of misery.

The horse settled the matter itself. It bucked once, gave a heart-wrenching rumble in its chest, and went down. It lifted its head, looked at him reproachfully, and with a deep sigh, breathed its last. Wirt said, "If you'd been afoot, yore weight wouldn't have worn its thrush so soon."

"Shut up!" Gordon rasped, and had he stood nearer, would have struck him. He was conscious of it, and three items rolled through his mind, shaking the walls of his insulated hate like thunder.

One, the outlaw had been right to start with; and out of pride and stubborn arrogance, Gordon had ridden beyond the point he would have. Two, the self-command he had always considered core-deep in him was wearing thin under the heat; it was not core-deep, then, it was but a shell. There was a Gordon beneath it about whom he knew absolutely nothing. Three, he was standing only two paces from Wirt and having the thought and feeling to strike him, could have stepped across the distance. His mind had failed to command the small but costly exertion. He wasn't the man of rock and iron he'd always thought. It was a shocking realization for a man whose whole life, and hate for criminals, was based upon a contempt for weakness.

WIRT HAD kept his saliva running with his tobacco-quid, but even that was growing thick in his dry mouth. He wiped his lips on a hairy wrists and licked them. "That hoss," he said, "was travelling on instinct and smell. We got to be sharp now or we are going to miss the High Well."

"What is it?" Gordon demanded through set teeth.

"It's...*ah!*" Wirt gasped with long spent breath. His eyes were pinpoints of slashing light in bare slits. He stared out into the throbbing wall of glare. "Yes, over there," he added and floundered ahead.

Gordon saw nothing for ten steps—then a bare variation, like a shadow in a fog, danced within the glare. Their footing had been firm; now it turned to loose sand-drift. The extra effort of the simple act of pulling through loose sand was a thing that told on the calves of a man's legs and wracking lungs and turned him mad. The deputy could feel the strain on his nerves in the tightness of his jaws.

He came up with Wirt, who had had hunkered and was sucking great, whistling breaths. He saw then how come Wirt had wanted him. There was a small butte here or rooted boulder, with a crevice running to a narrow, overhung ledge, maybe twenty feet up.

It would not have stopped a ten-year-old boy anywhere else. Here, in this heat and with bodies quivering with fatigue, the climb would take all of a younger man's muscle and determination and guts.

Gordon rested. He looked at Wirt, who nodded. He thought of his own canteen, still with water in it, and out of his hatred and arrogant distrust, cursed the outlaw. If the blow-hole up there was dry, that canteen held all the water in the world. He could not trust leaving it down here with a thirsted man. No matter what promise Wirt might give, he was a sneak and snake...an outlaw.

Gordon slipped his belt through the canteen-strap. He saw the catch of Wirt's breathing as he watched him. He could read that catch of breath, knew what it sprang from. Wirt had not meant to wait on water from the spring above.

He stepped into the jagged crevice and began his climb. One step; two steps; and the calves of his legs were straining and his knees were knocking against the rock. At the easy top he just clung there with gritted teeth for two full minutes. His heart was booming with the shaking effect of a physical impact. His senses were reeling and some far, inexorable voice within him was intoning that he could not make it; he might as well give up.

It was the quitting instinct, and Gordon had to fight it. He jerked with fury over the top. He sprawled out gasping, but not right then feeling his labor. He was streaked purple with effort, but grey with shock at himself.

Nothing in Gordon's life had ever remotely raised the voice of quitting in him. It was something that even now he gorged from admitting. He let his hatred of the outlaw surge through him, crowding out self-reproach; he thought of Wirt trying to make that climb and falling back from sheer gutlessness. He should have made the old wolf do it; it would have stripped the last remnants of his false front off him.

He blew for a long time—how long he had no way to guess. His booming heart was playing strange tricks on all his senses. Part of him seemed moving like a comet. Part of him did not function at all.

GORDON pulled around finally to where the blow-hole had worn its basin. In season, some geyser came up through the rock, but nothing came up now but a vague, hollow sound. There was cool in it, and air that a man could breathe. But the hole itself had filled with dust and sandrift. There was not even dampness.

He crawled back to the edge of the shelf and called down to the outlaw. His voice was thickening with fluting, rusty tones now. The force he put into his call hurt his throat and left him breathless.

Wirt made a *"No use,"* signal of his hands. "If she ain't damp, she's dead; she blows every hour when she's running," he cackled back.

Gordon crawled back and lay there over the choked basin, sucking in great lungsfull of this decent air, at least. Some of the dozy fire cleared out of his head; the twitching and quivering of his muscles ceased. Had he let himself, he could have slept. It was a thing he knew, and his resistance was a sign of his self-command that put new rawhide spirit in him. By gawdamighty, he would still get through to Largo where anyone else would quit! Get there and somehow drag in that outlaw!

He pulled himself off his belly and hunkered there, firing his hatred and feeling the fire heat the mettle of determination in him. He had two things to do and he'd do them both...prove the rightness of his hate and contempt to Dixie, and drive them both over the same hell trail until the weak one of them whined and cracked.

Gordon let himself down the crevice

and he stood over Wirt, glaring. "Nice trick!" he barked. "What did you figure it would get you?"

The outlaw sat with his legs stretched out, still gasping. The foot haul had been harder on him than Gordon noticed. His face was grim beneath the dust that clung in a thick coat through his grizzled stubble. But a gleam of cynical irony was in his eye.

"Mebbe the chance you've always wanted," he answered caustically. "The chance to show yo're tougher and harder than any other man alive. Mebbe you'll make Largo, and mebbe you won't. You've got some water, and only five miles to go. But it is five miles that can turn you like a corkscrew, mister."

"It won't corkscrew me because you know the trail," Gordon told him. "And yo're leading me in; that's price for half my water."

Speculation changed to fresh interest in Wirt. His cunning old-wolf face was tilted down, but his eyes slashed up from the shadow of his hat. "And that other deal about the gun still goes?"

Gordon glared at Wirt with a mixture of affront and bald contempt. "Any deal an honest man makes always sticks!" he rasped.

He unslung his canteen. "A sip, not a drink!" he snapped. He handed the canteen to the outlaw, standing over him to strike it from him if he tried to gobble.

Gordon watched eagerness rip across the man's whole face; the smell of the open canteen was enough to set his own body shaking. But Wirt took the time to go through a certain ritual before he drank. He sloshed the canteen by his ear, estimating the amount of water. He took his quid from his mouth and swallowed until his mouth was cleared of tobacco-saliva.

Then he took a patent match-container from a vest pocket and poured some of the contents into his hand. "Salt," he muttered and tossed it on his tongue, and with self-command that raised Gordon's anger to fury, he let it melt there before he took his drink, and it was a sip.

It took guts to hold that calm when a man was thirsted, guts that the deputy would not—could not—credit to Wirt's breed. Gordon damned him; he sought for an explanation and he found it. The man had had water left himself, even though he'd clawed the last trail-spring. He'd drunk his water, hogged it, out there in the desert where his horse dropped; and so he was not thirsted too bad before that. Just now he had limited his drinking from fear of the lawman's iron fist if he tried to wolf it.

Still the item stayed on Gordon's mind, in some way corroding him like acid. He could break this old wolf in his hands as he would a stick; he could leave him out there to die of thirst, and that alone would satisfy the sheriff. Probably, it crossed Gordon's mind, even more than bringing Wirt in.

But that wasn't part of the picture; it wasn't the play. What he had to do was make Wirt crack and crawl of his own worthless yellowness. He had to make Wirt see himself and admit himself and show himself the thing he was beneath his hardcase. And he'd walk the man through hell itself to do that.

THE OLD man proferred him the salt along with the canteen. With a contemptuous snort, Gordon spurned it. "Better have a taste," Wirt advised him. Irony touched his expression. "My price for seeing you stay alive long enough to get me in safe!"

Gordon took it with a grudging snap, but it was compromise that was a fresh irritant to him. He needed that salt like nothing holy and he knew it; the desert had leeched all of the salts out of him. But he should have had his own or else gone without

it. That was the deputy's code, the way he had trained himself to think. Only the force of realism made him accept it; but the need to take it was a lash upon his pride of self determination.

He took his sip and corked the canteen and said gruffly. "Hike."

Wirt squinted out at the throbbing glare as if he felt its texture with his eyes as he would with fingers. He said, "Evening soon, and a full night's moon. It would be smart to wait a bit."

Gordon scowled, feeling the bite of authority passing to his captive. But Wirt was an old desert-hand, and apparently knew this little-known desert; if it was possible to travel by night, the advice made sense. Nevertheless, this put judgment in the outlaw's hands and it was a hard compromise with Gordon's own position; the simple act of any compromise with—or trust in—an outlaw was a thing that roiled him and raised feelings akin to shame.

The deputy threw himself down with a gruff bark. He sucked on pebbles and was vaguely conscious of the light's change. The intensity of direct heat was cut and the heat eddied. Evening's gentler light slanted through the burning glare and the wall of fiery haze drew off slowly, burning back across the desert in orange brown flame. Sundown picked a horizon out of nowhere and then splashed its fierce pagan colors across the desert.

Shadows formed a mauve and blue and purple wash sweeping down the western grades; but the heat clung within the bosom of the burning sands, and the air stayed burned out, lifeless, throttling.

"Government fella told me once a man could live about forty-four hours in here if he was full watered and unmoving," Wirt rasped, out of some passing thought.

Gordon heard him, but didn't answer; there was no need. They were not full watered and they'd been—and would be—moving plenty. They'd make Largo by sunup, or they'd not make it at all.

He stood up and stood with his legs spraddled and his hands locked behind his back, squinting off into the still dancing heat but thin, transparent haze. He couldn't see the town but he could see the headland on which it sat. Didn't look far; and even over rough trail, five miles did not seem like much. But right now he could feel the exertion just of standing.

He threw himself back down and fell into torrid heat's half-conscious doze. His last rasping thought was that the salt was helping, and he dozed—hating and reviling Wirt the more for his having had it.

3

GORDON opened his eyes into dusk's velvet darkness, and came alert at the strange dead silence of this desert land. Only the vaguest of sounds lay out in all that stillness. No solitary creature gave its night call or moved out there, not even coyotes. There was only the faint movement of the earth as it breathed out the day's soaked-up heat, and the least whispering of the sands.

Night had dropped upon the desert. The rising moon put a coal red glow beyond the soot black roll of the outlying hills. But the stars were awash beyond the sea of heat that still writhed and danced around them, and no solitary freshness, no least movement, was in the lifeless airs that clung here.

In every day, death owned this desert and its malevolent spirit brooded and mocked the hopes and efforts of these men. The desert was old and cunning and merciless and could bide its time killing; but it whispered out

of its smothering silence that death was the price of breasting it.

Gordon's throat ached as it had never ached in the worst drought periods, and he clawed suddenly for his canteen with alarm. Wirt's hacking throat-stained chuckle came out of the darkness. "Don't worry, lawdog, I know the need of stretching that more than you do!"

"I'll stretch the water," Gordon rasped back. "So you can stretch a rope at the right time, friend!"

"Mighty harsh and ornery man," the outlaw considered. "You should be right glad for company. This is a lonesome place for a man alone. Not even a lizard for company."

"But I got a snake!" Gordon told him, and meant it. Nothing in the afternoon had lessened his hatred, and now he had the added bitter fuel of needing the old wolverine as much as Wirt needed him.

He licked cracked and hard-baked lips with a swollen tongue that was thick and furry. He reached his canteen around and tugged at the cork. The strengthless clumsiness of his fingers struck his consciousness like a blow in the ribs. This desert could kill a man even while he slept and without his knowing it. It sucked at his strength like a vampire bat; it left the shell of the man comparatively untouched but with no life in it.

Gordon twisted the cork out with rage locking his teeth. Rage did as much to set his blood coursing as did the small drink. He sat back breathing hard after it, feeling the urge for more that a man's arid body can put upon him.

Wirt offered, "Tobaccy? You'll be needing a chew of it."

The deputy started to blast a refusal, and caught himself short in midbreath. He snatched the plug and tore loose a chew, feeling the scrape of self-contempt rasp over his pride. But he told himself it was the cost of having to take in this other man. It was taking part of his water and the energy drain of watchfulness. But by gawd-amighty, he'd make Wirt pay; he'd walk the yellow guts spewing out of that snake!

Gordon handed over the canteen. He watched for a chance to bark at the other wolfing, but Wirt gave him no opportunity; he took his small drink without ever swallowing. He uptilted the canteen and just let his drink seep through his lips.

It was a hard thing for a thirsted man to do, but it was a trick Gordon had know as a boy and since forgotten; he damned himself and damned Wirt double; and his hate pumped out the oils of a fighting man's nature into his sored and aching muscles.

The outlaw handed back the canteen and cleared his throat and said, "It is like this, Buster. The trail we take covers two miles of checkered hardpan, then two miles of solid lava ridge where it ain't drifted over. Then there is a mile of sand dunes, all upgrade; and there is a spring by a tree and the Barrens trail—with one more mile into Largo."

"That doesn't sound bad, except for deadfalls," Gordon rasped.

"No," Wirt agreed with grim irony, "it doesn't *sound* it. And there are no deadfalls, and no cracks wider than a foot."

"So you've been using this desert all the time, and the old men's tales had everybody thinking it was impassable?" the deputy growled.

"I've used it," the outlaw admitted, "enough to know what they tell is so." He pointed a fist out at the spreading moonglow. "When that moon turns gold, we can go. We'd best rig some kind of short rope."

So this was it! Gordon thought, grim satisfaction welling out of his self-esteem and impotent anger at Wirt for not yet having cracked and spilled the whining and vicious and sneaky things locked behind the false front of the outlaw breed. There was some trick in the outlaw's mind, something he meant to do to Gordon that he could do safely without fear of retribution; maybe leave the deputy down in some hole they'd come to—one that could not be scaled by a lone man.

THE JIGSAW began to fit together, now; the picture began to form in the shape that Gordon expected. Wirt had turned off into the desert he knew, part in desperation, part in blind fright. When his horse had gone down, he had waited in sureness that the lawman would follow him. He had not dared risk his last shot on the deputy, and probable return fire, in that dancing heat where vision was unsure. Then maybe he'd had time to think while he was waiting, and figured that now that he was in the desert and afoot, only a strong man could get him out.

Gordon decided the outlaw had known that High Well was already dry. But he had figured that the deputy would leave his canteen on the ground when he climbed up, or maybe that Gordon would fall off the wall with heat-fatigue—in either case giving Wirt all the water.

As Gordon suvived and kept control of the water, the old wolf had to change his plans. He'd been lying there figuring out their trail ahead and worked out some cunning piece of double-cross to do with that rope. He was figuring he'd use Gordon's guts, and iron will, and energy to get them almost out of this hell; then he would pull some double-cross, leaving the deputy marooned, as good as dead.

That suited Gordon; it was answer to the pricking doubts he'd felt, and filled him with a feeling of savage righteousness and justification. This wolverine was still playing his cunning game, and as long as he had that belief in his cunning superiority, his hard-case front would hold up reasonably.

But Gordon had a way to hamstring that, and make Wirt crack and spill; it was a way with no cunning in it, but just sheer honest manhood—the kind of a way he could take a primitive anticipation in. He meant to walk the starch out of this human gila monster; he was going to drive Wirt to frenzy of fatigue and hopelessness as you could a scorpion, and make him sting himself with sheer gutless panic.

Gordon had needed that explanation and justification of his hate of outlaws. This gnarled lean old wolf had shown too much calm and self-control and fortitude for a cornered rat. The thought had been chipping at Gordon's wall of scathing contempt that maybe there was some rightness in the things Dixie had said in favor of the outlaw—which would make the deputy wrong in some of his deepest convictions. And if a man was wrong in one thing, how did he know where it ended? He could even be wrong in that deepest conviction of all—his opinion of himself.

The moon rolled over the hills, savage, angry red, then somehow turned to shimmering, smudged yellow and lay its gold-saffron light like waves upon the throbbing heat that still gave off the desert. Wirt got up and carefully stretched every muscle in him like a cat. He did this slowly, not violently; he was cautious of hurting any strained or heat fried muscle.

Gordon blasted a breath of contempt and gave his usual stretch. Something

popped at the base of his neck, and for that instant he did not know if he could bring his head back to normal position again. He brought it back by sheer will; the pain of it brought sweat popping out like bullets on his forehead.

Wirt had fashioned a short rope with rawhide ties out of pieces of his vest and some things he'd been wearing on his belt. "I reckon," he said, "the best way right now is to loop this on our wrists."

Rest and water, and salt and tobacco, had not compensated for the corroding action the heat had already started in his body. His voice was reedy, harsh and grated. But Wirt's eyes looked mocking in the moonlight. "'Course, you don't have to bother," he added.

"I'll bother!" Gordon grunted. "Just to see I don't get out ahead and lose you!"

He slipped one rawhide loop over his wrist and they started. The air had felt simply oven-dead while they were idle. Within a hundred yards, Gordon's lungs ached, and sounds began to hammer in his head. He slowed his pace, and caught the sandy whistle of what Wirt meant for a chuckle. "That's better. Easy does it," the outlaw muttered. "That is a long long five miles ahead."

THE LIGHT and shadow was uncertain, but nothing like the glare of day had been. A hill had a third dimension, a gulley showed a fall. They came onto the field of hardpan and the cracks were black.

This field was flat as a stove-top, in a general way of speaking. Mostly, the cracks were not hard to see nor wide; but the two had not been in the field fifteen minutes before the laborious process of crossing it impressed itself upon Gordon's legs. There was no even distance between these cracks, and no symmetry of pattern to their shape. He would step out with a full stride and his heel would come down in a crack. Or maybe an edge would be just behind the ball of his foot, throwing his balance violently.

It was a crossing where a man had to hold his vision clear and alert upon the ground beneath him, and pick his way as carefully as if going through a field of razor-sharp salt kneedes. There was another thing—the checkered patches of hardpan were reasonably flat in themselves, but some had sunk and some tilted a little. Not much, but enough to put the opposite patch a half or a quarter inch higher or lower.

Just that...that infinite, small variation; it could throw a tired or careless man upon his face. It could stumble him, cause him a twist to catch his balance that filled his breathing with a tremble of hurt, and could really strain him.

Gordon took four lurches with anger flaming high inside of him. This was the maddening fight a man faced in the desert...the fight with an enemy he couldn't get his hands on. Unconsciously, pride threw his loop-arm out each time so that the deputy would catch balance before he tugged the tow-line, saving himself the chuckle he knew Wirt had in readiness for him.

The fifth lurch was a bad one that would have thrown him down completely. It jerked the line taut, and only the outlaw's swift anchoring pull saved the fall and steadied him. Gordon's fury had him ready to bark at Wirt's scoffing comment.

But the outlaw had stopped and rooted himself in dead silence. He did not relax the line immediately; he played it as he would a line on a blue-blooded pony he was being cautious to keep from hurt. He gave Gordon full chance to catch balance and to steady.

Then he said, very gravely, "Easy does it. There is a lot of this and it ain't hard to get turned in a circle."

"Just mind *yore* footing. I'll tend to mine!" Gordon rasped. The anger was in him, but self-reliance was shak-

en, and the arrogance that came of it. He had scorned the cautious, mincing, feeling steps that the old outlaw was taking. But Wirt hadn't lurched or fallen.

"He knows the way; he knows the tricks!" the deputy grated to himself. But the explanation was not enough. A man with crawling fear and jumpy panic simmering inside of him did not have the iron it took to keep from impatience, to control his nervousness.

THEY PAUSED for a blow and small sip of water, and Wirt cut sign upon certain stars and landmarks. "If you can't see anything else but hell's open gates," he grunted, "still bear on that star between those roundtops."

That marker was an oblique angle from the trail Gordon would of himself have picked, and he sparked hard and alert with suspicion; but he was in the outlaw's hands, and mockery was a thing clear in Wirt's expression. Gordon damned him, he cursed him, but he did it silently. Talk in these strangling, burned-out airs took precious strength. But worse, the outlaw had the whip and knew it, and knew that Gordon knew it...that was the bitter ignominy.

They went forward again more carefully. It didn't seem possible that it could take so much time and energy to cover a few steps. The cracks caused their trail to zig, and then they would have to judge and zig-zag back to bring their line reasonably straight again.

Day's baking heat had dulled the senses against the weary monotony of plodding. There was still heat and it was deadening, but it was not the same. Gordon's nerve-ends felt tender as his pony's thrush had been. Pains jabbed his mind, super alert, and raked him with the pain of physical torture. He had to fight for balance; he had to fight the muscles of his legs to keep them working. His joints felt filled with rust, and his muscles withered. But it was the burned-out airs, runing through his raw lungs like a sandstorm, that were worst of all. Airs so dead that they gave a man's body scarcely the return strength that the breathing alone had taken from him.

He felt a violent tug on the line and was almost jerked off-balance himself. He looked back; Wirt had gone down sprawling. It struck him then that the outlaw had been lurching wildly for some time, but Gordon had not realized it through his own preoccupation.

He started to pull Wirt erect, but the outlaw shook his head and gasped stridently, "Water!" He sat where he'd fallen, his legs spraddled out and the weight of his shoulders resting on his hands. The crossing had etched the lines of his rapacious, predatory life deep into his grime-soaked face; now the moon threw its shadow of silver light upon him, and all of the wickedness and cunning and cruelty of his past was clear to see, as if he had been listening to the tally of his misdeeds read out to him.

No slightest compassion for the old man touched the deputy. Gordon felt nothing but a hard and righteous satisfaction that the outlaw's shell was beginning to crack, and that the ugly core of the man was coming to the surface. He wouldn't trust him with the water; he tilted the canteen to his mouth for him. He gave him only half his drink and meant to give him the rest. He could tell the violent thirst that filled from the hollow sob within his gasps and the shaking of his body.

But when he offered Wirt his second half, the outlaw tore his gaze away from the canteen and shook his head. "We'll be needing that," he said.

Fury blazed through Gordon. Right then, he could have kicked the man. That damned drink had sealed the crack in his hardcase for the moment.

He took his own first half drink. Arrogance almost caused him to take the rest; then pride slapped him, and he rammed the cork back into the canteen muttering, cursing Wirt to hell and back and dead.

He hunkered down to rest the strain out of his muscles. He would have given much to lie down for shut-eye. Maybe Wirt sensed his feelings or maybe it was just chance. The outlaw rolled sidewise and scrabbled up on shaking legs. He cut sign on markers and studied the moonlight that lapped the still-writhing sea of heat; after a time he said, "We're late."

Gordon drew himself erect and found that the effort set his muscles quivering. He had seen horses gaunt out like this before they dropped dead from sheer exertion. He had never seen a man in this condition who hadn't already gone crazy.

They plodded on and the stabbing pains inside the deputy's head turned into dull, booming explosive noises. His brains were drying out in his skull; he could feel it. He could feel the space between the brain and skull forming, and it was filled with those sounds and sheets of colored fire that he could somehow see, as if he were looking there inside his head. His ability to think was tightening up, like an overdone roast in a too-hot oven. Flashes of fear began to rip across his self control like lightning-flashes through the heat-clouds. He threw them off and put his full concentration on the enormous task of each individual step in front of him. But the flashes were there and closing in, like the outstringers of a tornado twisting in upon a drought area.

The checkered hardpan ended abruptly, and they stumbled onto solid ground and threw themselves down like spent swimmers reaching shore. Their bodies were quivering like aspens, but the mental relief, the sense of achievement, gave him a grim lift of spirit that was incredible.

4

AHEAD OF them, a low, dome-shaped ridge snaked off in a black streak under the rippling silver moonlight. It would offer a better mark, a guide to hold them to their trail, Gordon thought. With luck, and without hitting impossible drybeds or arroyos, they should make it.

He shook his canteen. He took a little bigger drink on the strength of their success. He still wouldn't trust Wirt with that water, and he contemptuously held it to the old man's lips. But the outlaw was more careful of his drink than Gordon had been; he shook the deputy's hand after, to catch and estimate the slosh of water. They were both seasoned men in this judgment. There were perhaps six drinks—of the kind they'd had—left.

They lay there blowing hard, but that close to the ground there was simply no air. They sat up because it was easier on their lungs. Breath tore through their throats and nostrils like drought-winds through dried salt grass. Their lungs were wrenched, wracking. Gordon's lungs felt convulsed, in the way of sick stomach, trying to retch itself out of him.

He took his rest; he even waited a little extra, enjoying the realization of what he did as something beyond his personal needs that he granted in consideration for Wirt, whose strength was sapping. He would not credit that to what the outlaw might have gone

through before they hit the desert, or to the age of the man. He put it down to yellow fear and gutless quitting core of the outlaw breed, when stripped of physical superiority and up against the things only tough fibered courage could pull a man through.

Gordon pulled to his feet, and it was a personal fight to do that; he stood looking down with grim contempt at this shrieking cracking man. Wirt shook his head. He pulled out his tobacco plug and studied it; there was not much left. He seemed to debate and then he snagged off half and poked up the rest.

"Chew on that and give the juice time to stoke you up," he rasped; "that is going to be a hard climb up onto that lava ridge."

"Up?" Gordon grunted with startled anger. "You gone loco? There's no footing on that hogback!"

Wirt gave a half-note of strident laughter. "It is all the footing we are going to get. The salt needled down here on the flats would spear yore boots like they was paper; and you go around 'em and you've got a canyon."

Gordon cursed through his teeth, tore the tobacco from the outlaw's hand, and stood there chewing—not liking the taste of the stuff, but forced to admit the strength it gave, and the way it kept the saliva working in a man. He studied the black ridge all afresh and he knew the way it had held day's blazing heat; and the way it would bake a man; and the way that rounded, hogback top would throw his balance.

Then he hunkered down, filled with impotent fury at being in the outlaw's hands, and turning his feelings into his burning hatred and contemplation of the time when the man would crack.

WIRT WAITED a full half hour and then scrambled to his feet. He was a man who showed his age fully now, but Gordon put it down to the life he'd led and the spinelessness that turned this breed to human wolverines—because they did not have the courage to resist the easy way in life, or toil in honest sweat. Wirt had been plenty tough with his hardcase riders around him; and a good horse under him; and a gun—with the drop on some slower man. He wasn't so tough now on his own and facing his craven end. The toughness, the hardness, was stripping off of him in shreds.

Wirt nodded and led out now, hitting a dark shadow of the lava and clawing up this round-edge crack half on knees and hands. They reached the hogback and flopped down on it, their breaths screaming. Their hands were damaged from the blistering heat and roughness of what looked like smooth rock. The heat burned even through their boots and pants.

They got going finally. Wirt was worried about the time; they were playing against sunup, he claimed, but Gordon took it as the worry a cracking man offers to hide the panic eating its way through him. They moved single-file where they could, but it was not often. Mostly, they had to move neck and neck on opposite sides of the rolling top, using the line and each other's weight as counter balance.

It sounded easy; perhaps it looked easy; but each ten-foot advance was torture. The heat set the soles of their feet afire; there were humps and rolls in the surface of the ridge that caught and threw them. Wirt was slowing, and his breathing sounded like the breath of death. Once, Gordon sprawled out completely—unable to catch his balance—and landed hard enough to hurt his spent body badly, with nothing but the short line holding him. He looked down over the rolling, dome-shaped side of the lava ridge, and knew what it would have meant to an unattached man to take that tumble. There was no flatness, no sharp outcrop, on all that side to break a man's fall or stop him rolling. He'd go down there like a tumble-

weed, carried of his own weight. Even if he could bring himself to a right angle, Gordon doubted if he could pull himself back up again.

They had two drinks of water each, but it was no longer anything but a tantalizing dampness. Thirst was a berserk thing of primitive animal force moving through them. It wanted to crowd out all other feelings; it snarled and chewed at a man's cool reason and caution; it wanted to make him run and yell reaching for half-formed visions of water that could not exist. Twice, Gordon caught himself reaching violently, uncaringly, for the canteen; the last time, only the line on his left wrist saved him from grabbing it before he thought. It was sign of what fatigue was doing to him that he cursed Wirt with murderous hatred, even as he realized what had prevented him from wolfing that precious drink.

They reached the end of the lava and had to stop and nerve themselves against rushing down the last inclined pitch with lurching steps that would wreck them. The going down was harder than any part of their arduous climb. Their nerves were snapping; their muscles jumping; they were dazed—beginning to craze—and spent. The lava had the feel of a bronco that sought to throw them. The outlaw was quietest, most in self control, and Gordon felt hell's own fury for him.

They sprawled flat on sands at the bottom that were giving up the last of yesterday's burning heat. The sands were warm, but after the lava they felt cool and soft. Wirt was whimpering uncontrollably in his throat, like a hurt kid crawling into the arms of mother. But it was Wirt who jerked Gordon out of a bottomless hole of gentle and soothing sleep, and to his feet; and it was Wirt who swung him, jerking and lurching, wildly on the end of the rope until Gordon's senses got to going and he could grasp reason.

"You'll wake up crazy!" Wirt rasped. His voice was a choked cackle, now. "You're got a mile of sand ahead, man!"

That sounded like nothing after the ten million miles of hell they'd crossed. But Gordon had hiked through sand dunes, and he knew the terrible, heart-tearing cost.

THEY STOOD there swaying, gasping, and fighting for their wits. No other solitary sound than their rasped breathing came to break the grim and throttling silence. The moon was dropping, but there was the added reflection of the sand's whiteness. Stars were paling out of the fault of heaven and there was the feel up there in the sky of first dawn, but that was a dawn in another world, as far as the morning star. Down here there was only the dead, airless silence, and that sea of sand dunes stretching out ahead.

Wirt was unshackling his wrist loop. "Jist give me my last drink and let me be," he sobbed.

Sobbed....that was the thing that struck like a sound inside Gordon's head, and cleared it of heat waves to sharp consciousness. So the outlaw was breaking now, finally, like the gutless breed he was. Breaking just short of the last mile that would save them!

"I'll give you the drink, but by gawdamighty, I'll pull you in if I have to drag you!" Gordon barked back. But it wasn't a bark; his voice came in reedy gasps, and he heard with amazement his own lung-deep sob.

They had the last drink. They blew and stared off into the sand dunes. The sands gave under Gordon's boots and clawed at his steps worse than swamp muck. The sand held him down and

skidded him back and fought him; and now when he fell—which was often—they slammed him with the hard impact of rock. He fought his way up endless sand dunes, cursing, sharing. He'd lurch down the other side into hollows of utterly dead air, bawling.

First dawn came, and then darkness through the dunes, and Gordon didn't know whether he had slept out the period to real dawn or not. His teeth were clamped tight, as with tetanus, and his mouth was pulled half around onto his jaw; the veins of his body stood out bulging, and his muscles were dry cords sawing against skin leeched of all fatty tissue. His throat was filled with barbed wire; hammers were beating inside his skull; and a million hot wires were crisscrossed through his eyeballs. The first rays of sunup were a hot blast on him; he was still in the sand dunes amd hollering crazed sounds out of a raw, swollen throat.

He had the crushing consciousness then of what it meant to be caught at this end of the trail by sunup. Just that first break of fresh heat on an utterly spent body told him. That, and the clear, hard light upon eyes strained almost beyond the point of vision. There was no glare yet, but this was worse than glare; the light broke off the sands and rubbed like the sands themselves upon his eyeballs.

He cried and whimpered and raged his way over the last three dunes. He could go no further; he fought his way to the last top, just out of a man's timeless instinct to die at least where he could look out at something. He was ready to fall and quit on that top when he looked from it onto a brown dirt, rock-strewn grade—and at its top, not too far off his line of trail, the tree that marked the spring and the Barrens trail into Largo.

Gordon ran up the grade, blubbering and hollering hoarsely, like a scared kid. He damned near drowned in the waterhole before he realized he still had Wirt with him. The man was sucking frantically at the water and making sounds like a whipped, dying dog. He was broken, busted, completely finished, for all that Gordon must have literally hauled him over the sand dunes. And now there was at least hope of the Law's leniency ahead.

Gordon thought it right and just that this human vulture should have to crawl in whining to his end; it fired his hatred up afresh and gave it the fuel of justification. He'd been through the same thing himself and hadn't known the trail or what to expect; and by gawdamighty, he toted more than his own weight and he was still not finished. He meant to get them into Largo.

He cast his rope off, lurched to his feet. There wasn't a chance in hell of Wirt's getting far or running out on him. Given a fresh horse and gun and water, and he doubted Wirt had the guts left even to climb aboard and made a run for it.

"STAY HERE and founder yoreself!" Gordon rasped mercilessly, and swung and lurched off for the trail to Largo.

He stumbled into Billings saloon; it was still early and the swamper and Billings himself were the only men. Billings took one long, startled look at him, cut the story from the sign, and set out a full bottle of his good whiskey, and a full pitcher of water.

Billings leaned on the bar and watched Gordon catch his strength and wind.

"So you made the crossing of the desert?" he grunted with the grudging respect of a man who does not like another man. "Well, you've played tough a long time, Gordon and I guess now we've got to say it made you tough. That more than makes up for the time you quit the grass fire and went off and hid."

The deputy stared out of eyes that looked like pits of fire, buried under

the charred skeletons of green logs that had burned dead. Billings was saying something that went back fifteen years to when he was a kid—bringing up a memory that Gordon himself had closed out and forgotten, but now recalled with a shame he could not close out of his feelings or his head.

Billings nodded and reached a second shotglass and poured them both a drink. "Well, boy, this morning's drinks are mine; and I will take back many a rough thing I've said," he grunted.

They drank and Gordon was vaguely conscious that Billings told him the sheriff was out of town. He dragged his burned feet toward the door, not paying much attention, lost in the shame and shock of what the barkeep had told him, and feeling a strange sensation all through him, like the shifting of tumblers in a lock.

He stood on the stoop and looked across the still idling town to the *Dixie Eats* and thought of various things Dixie had said. Particularly he thought of the good things she'd said about the outlaw, and of the stubborn, truculent way he had denied them, or even her right to think them.

He thought them over one by one now and his thinking was against that picture of their fight across the desert; and of the things he'd been wrong about out there; and the compromises he'd had to make; and of things in Wirt's favor, even if he was core-deep bad.

Yes, the outlaw had broken physically, but he was an old man; and suddenly Gordon realized there was no hate left in him, nor even contempt for Wirt. The outlaw was simply a man who'd gone wrong, but held both good and bad; and Billings had just reminded Gordon of himself and made him see the fact of weakness as well as strength in every man.

Gordon moved across to the sheriff's office. He got down two guns and loaded them with one shell each, and laid his star upon the desk. He went round to the stables, barked down a hostler's startled questions and got his own private horse, which he kept there. He rode back to the spring and swung down and shoved one gun into the outlaw's hand.

WIRT HAD rested and soaked up dampness during this time that Gordon was still moving. It made their physical condition about even.

The deputy said softly, "There's yore gun, ready to fire on yore last bullet. You were right, and I had just one bullet left myself."

Gordon backed off ten paces with the wooden, lurching, uncontrolled movement of utterly spent legs. "One bullet each and one horse," he said. "Shoot to kill, Wirt. It's yore only chance."

The outlaw hefted the gun with his lifelong, automatic instinct for weapons. He studied the young deputy with his head cocked. Some humor touched his worn and gaunted expression. "Yessir, a hard man. But a square man, Gordon," he granted. "I hope yo're hard enough to shoot that way yoreself. I don't hanker to be under that killer boss of yore's."

Gordon nodded and held his gun down at his side and watched the outlaw. Wirt lurched suddenly to the side, threw his gun up and broke the rise of his arm with his other hand. His gun blasted into the bark of Gordon's shot. The deputy staggered and grabbed for his left arm; Wirt lurched in a complete circle, stopped, then dropped.

Gordon moved over to him and saw his shot had found a mark. There was a rattle in the outlaw's hard breathing, and he was on his way into a man's last sundown. The deputy's mouth twisted and he growled, "I dunno as I had to do that; but it was yore outfit that killed the two men I had with me."

Wirt made a feeble gesture with his hand and his mouth cracked out in a grimace that was meant to be a grin.

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Digger John and the Frenchman

Series Character Story

by A. A. Baker

"He's lost in the mountains! Digger's out there in that mess, maybe with a busted leg, or somethin'. He's got a crazy Frenchman with him...but the Frenchman's too skinny to eat, so we gotta go out and find Digger John." "Why?" shouted storekeeper Black. "He owe yew money like he does me?" "That's a good reason," yelled back Dredger, "but if *yew* was out there, the fust one on the trail would be Digger John!"

WINTER comes to the mountains like a bull enjoying his first taste of freedom from the pen, stamping its hoofs and pawing up the grassy earth. Men look back on the summer reflectively and button their coats to face the rigors so soon to spew out of the cloud-smothered sky. Slim Deakins, enjoying the last bit of sunshine before the storms hovering over Donner Summit raged into Gold Run, rested on the boardwalk in front of Dredger Dan's *Hotel and Saloon*. He lifted his green eyeshade into the narrow peak of his hairline and pointed, with a thin cigar, to the man asleep in front of an adobe house.

"You scratch a mountain man, and your fingers come away with dirt under the nails but, there's one mountain man...Digger John, right over there. Scratch *him* and you'll come away with skin off your nose." Slim bent his head in a listening attitude, then rose and walked to the edge of the walk. With a slight smile, he continued.

"Hear that stagecoach coming?" His listener, a whiskey drummer new to the Sierras, nodded. "Then, my friend, you will witness one of the sights of the day. Something interesting is always going on here in Gold Run. There's a hanging, or a celebration of a new strike; but Smiley Parrish, the stage-driver, and Digger are old enemies—so just watch those six horses when they wheel down Main street."

The iron-rimmed wheels rattled on the river-gravel strewn road. The snort of the steaming horses, and the squeak of the leather springs on the rocking stage, could be heard by the men inside the bar room. They crowded out onto the walk and, glasses in hand, waited for the fun.

They could see a grin light up Smiley's face as he caught his first view of Digger John's sleeping form. With the skill of a veteran hill-driver, he leaned the horses against the right walkway. The wheels chucked rocks onto the walk that rattled against the lower parts of the buildings.

As the racing horses reached a point opposite the snoring miner, Smiley whooped and wheeled the leaders. The off-horses followed and brought the stage around with a snap. Smiley hung to the iron hand hold, slammed hard on the foot brake, and the stage slewed in a perfect arc. The street

Consternation reigned as Digger tossed the skunk under the batwing doors, then threw the barking dog after it!

rocks spurted out, caught the glint of the sun, and showered Digger John. The dust filled his half-open eyes; egg-sized rocks pelted his face and rolled down his stomach.

Digger came fully awake and floundered out of his chair. His boots slipped on the round stones and he crashed into the street. There he sat, beefy hands bracing his back, legs spread like calipers. The dust settled, until his hair was as dirty as his angry face.

Smiley gave a yell of pure pleasure and raced out of the lower end of town. A traveling-case spilled off the baggage-deck as the stage rounded the last turn and disappeared behind a dust-screen through Stewarts' Mud Mine, towards Dutch Flat.

DIGGER JOHN rose, brushed his pants, reached back to the chair for a tattered black hat and started across toward Dredger Dan's saloon. He had stopped to shuck a rock out of his boot when a frightened skunk raced out from behind Black's Store.

Digger, caught with one boot off, a red toed sock dangling, hunched his broad back until he looked like a boy holding a twenty-pound watermelon to his stomach, and took it.

A brown dog, ears standing, toes bunched, tail lashing, caught the skunk between Digger's legs. The black hair of the skunk flew; the snarling dog slashed at the tail of the infuriated animal and Digger covered his face with both hands and howled in sheer misery.

The gathered crowd, well back against the board walls of the frame building, cheered and hooted as the dust rose about the poor miner who was caught in a malestrom of dust, dirt and an aroma that rose to the sky and spread out until it drove the onlookers back inside the buildings.

In complete despair, eyes filled with stinging tears, Digger John got one arm under the dog's chest, lifting the snapping animal off the ground, and took a kick at the still-fighting skunk. With complete disdain, the skunk ignored the kick, sidled off across the street, and slipped under the boardwalk. The brown dog struggled in Digger's arm as he retrieved his boot and limped toward the saloon.

His broad jaw was extended in suffering. The black hair that straggled under his hat was rank with sweat. His tongue crowded his dry mouth as he laid a heavy hand on the batwings. Startled, he drew back and stood in bewilderment, the dog still struggling, and stared into the black barrels of Dredger Dan's double-barrel shot gun.

"Get on yore way, Digger. Can't stand yew smellin' like that; it's bad enough when yew smell just usual." The bullfrog bellow sang its harsh insults from behind the yawning gun.

"I don't smell any worse'n yore likker," raged the angry miner. "This's the lowest thing yew've *ever* done to me. Attacked by a skunk an' yew refuse me a drink that's needed like it's never been needed." In fury, Digger raised the boot and smashed the gun out of Dredger's hands. It exploded, tearing leather out of Digger's boot and the pellets screamed their way across the street and tapped against Black's store.

Digger turned and walked firmly back across the street. He lifted the dog high in the air, while he reached under the walk and retrieved the still-angry skunk. Then, holding the two animals apart, he marched straight back to the batwings. He let out a yell and threw the skunk under the door, slid the dog after and, with a peaceful smile, listened to the uproar. Then, with a cautious hand, he pulled the batwings toward him and stepped back as the screaming men dashed from the bar-room. Dredger Dan, cursing bitterly, was the last to leave. Digger tipped his hat to Dredger's back, stepped inside, walked over to the whiskey barrel, toasted himself in the back mirror, leaned his elbows on the bar and watched the skunk whip the tar out of the brown dog.

The room turned blue with the aroma. Digger smiled mistily and dipped his tin cup in the barrel. He felt his senses slipping and staggered to the door. He got his head halfway out the batwings when a man threw a rope over his head, dragged him to the water trough, and hoisted him in. He lay there, while water seeped through his clothes, and a translucent film of oil raced over the water's surface.

Dredger shouted. "Ten dollars to anyone'll get that skunk outa my saloon. Don't care how it's done; just get it out!"

"I'll give twenty dollars..." mumbled Digger..."just to see it."

"Taken!" The high voice of Joe Portage snapped. He hurried around to the back alley as the crowd waited. Digger ducked his head like a seal and spewed water over the men crowded in front of his view.

Suddenly, billows of grey smoke shot out of the windows, and Joe Portage began shrieking in Canadian French. Dredger, realizing that his hotel was on fire, opened his fat jowls, raised his short arms over his balding head and screamed, "That fool's set the place on fire!"

"It done the job, though." Digger pointed a thumb as the skunk raced from under the batwings and hurried for the brush back of the Teamster's Corral. The brown dog was fifty feet behind and gaining ground.

NIGHT HAD set before the fire was subdued. The flames had eaten out the Hotel kitchen and seared the end beams of the barroom. Dredger Dan, face streaked with soot, his white apron a blotched limp rag in his angry hand, rolled a full barrel of whiskey onto the board walk. He mounted a chair and shouted. "This barrel of whiskey goes to the man that brings me the hide of that brown cur..." A mutter rose from the assembly as Dredger continued. "It's the third time this month he's rousted a skunk off Cold Spring Mountain an' run it through Gold Run. He's got to be killed 'fore..."

"That's not his fault." Digger John muscled his way to the front. Dredger's mouth was still open ready to continue his irate speech but Digger slipped an eighteen inch Bowie from his soggy belt and laid it expertly, back and forth, across his calloused palm.

"The dog can't help it. Just like dogs jump porcupines, they'll do it over again, in spite of them bristles."

"I don't care, Digger," shouted Dredger. "Just look at my place. Burnt half-out; the smell's 'bout gone, but..." he raised an angry fist and shouted again... "Barrel of whiskey goes to the man bringin' me the hide of that brown dog!"

"And..." Digger's voice was harsh... "we'll *bury* him with the whiskey!" He reached forward and hooked Dredger's fat body by his belt, then drove the knife through the leather and into the rough board of the doorway. He kicked the chair out from under the struggling man. "I'm declarin' that dog under my custody!" He turned and walked away.

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Before he reached the middle of the street, he halted, his bushy head bent forward as he stared at the man approaching from the lower town. He watched the man's limping approach, then muttered, a threat still in his voice, "Who're yew?"

"Dairjean, she is my name." The figure was dressed in black with a ruffled, bibbed shirt, so white it caught the moonlight and lighted his narrow jaw. He edged closer to Digger and rolled his small head back appreciatively. "I sell scent. The car-barn driver, she refuse to stop thees place, thees afternoons." He sniffed again and moved closer to Digger who took another step backward. "Thees scent you are wearing, she is native?"

Mouth agape, Digger edged another step away, like a bull moose inspecting a mouse and afraid of stepping on it. Dairjean followed, still talking. "But, to continue. Off the stage roof, the driver lost my case of samples. You have seen it?"

"Come to remember," Digger John finally found his voice, "a suitcase *did* fall off Smiley's stage. Let's...a... take a look down the street."

"Smokey, with a trace of spirits?" Dairjean's voice was questioning, like a chemist analyzing his mixture. "But the wild scent, she is something new? Like burnt roses, perhaps? Ah, but," the dandy hurried forward and, with a manicured hand, retrieved from the dry grass, a narrow sample case. He flicked the catch and anxiously explored it's contents. "She is all right. It is safe. Now..." he laid a gentle hand on Digger's shrinking arm... "Can we have a place for conversing? A cafe perhaps? The scent, she is very broad but, with proper dilution, perhaps we will make the discovery. No?"

"Now look, Dar-jim!" Digger snapped. "There's a hotel just at the end of the street. Get a room there. Tomorrow, I'll talk about anythin' yew want but, not tonight. I gotta find some place to bury my clothes. Goodnight." The miner strode purposefully away.

Dairjean stood in the street, bump-

ing his sample case with his knees, and watched him go. "A singulair expression I must remember," he muttered. "Bury the clothes. Means to sleep, perhaps?" He shrugged, hoisted his case onto a thin shoulder and, with a militant whistle, marched toward Dredger Dan's Hotel.

THE SUN had barely stretched itself over Mount Baldy when Digger was awake and hurrying across the dewy street toward Dredger's saloon. The swamper had a nice fire in the stove, which looked like a potbellied man in a red vest. Dredger, face clouded but cleansed of soot, was rubbing down the water-stained bar.

"Wanta drink?" he sneered, tiredly.

"No..." Digger dipped his tin cup in the whiskey barrel... "but if yew're buyin' the fust one, I'll join yew." He looked at the hotel owner speculatively. "What'sa matter with yore nose? Somebody hit...?"

"No," snapped the bar man. "Fella come in last night. A Frenchman either buyin' or lookin' for new stuff for perfume. His sample case musta sprung a leak. Plugged my nose with cotton against it. Worse'n that skunk yew run in here."

" 'Allo, 'allo! She is a good morning, no?" Dairjean jauntily descended the open sided stairs from the second floor. The two men turned to stare. A diamond glinted from the white ruffled shirt. A medal, complete with blue ribbon and gold fob, dangled from beneath his cerise handkerchief. The pants, wide at the hips, were blue black and held straight and taut by a strap that ran under the arch of his polished black half-boots.

Digger hunched over his drink, rinsed his mouth with whiskey, spat at the stove, watched the blue smoke rise and muttered. "Good mornin', partner." Dredger Dan ducked his head and nodded with the embarrassment of a man thinking someone was making a fool of himself.

Dairjean made the stairs an entrance. Mincing his way down and staring around at the sawdust covered floor, the green-topped poker-tables, the serving door to the kitchen. "Can one get the breakfast?" he asked.

"Shore." Digger John suddenly became affable. "Have an eye-opener first. Dredger, pour Dar-jim a drink."

"It's my pleasure an' will get rid of that stinkin' perfume." The fat man wiped a glass with the dirty end of the apron, dipped his whole hand into the barrel, slipped the bar-towel under the glass and stood with an expectant elbow propped like a baby cougar.

Dairjean took the brimming glass, raised it, nodded to Digger and tipped it down. He let the first few drops enter his throat than spat furiously at the stove. He threw the glass, waited until it shattered, then reached a thin arm across the bar and slapped Dredger full in the face.

Dredger, taken unawares, remained in his elbow-spread stance. His face was still wreathed with the questioning smile of a welcome host. Dairjean banged him again, leaped nimbly onto the bar and kicked him on the jaw with the side of his polished boot.

Dredger lost his head. He tried to hit back with the bung-starter but the flailing feet of the Frenchman kicked it out of his hand and the next kick laid the fat man out cold on the back bar floor.

"It is the insult, not the whiskey." Dairjean turned with his unhurried explanation to Digger.

"Yew done him up real proud," snorted the big miner. "But, don't be around when he wakes up an' finds his shotgun."

"Then we will go?" began the small man. Digger stood with his cup half-raised. "I will retain you to complete my commission. You do not understand, yes? A salary will be forthcoming," he continued in the face of Digger's silence. "My commission is to be able to contact the Wamoltani

tribe of Indians. It has been reported to us that they use a grade of scent, not known..."

"Just-a-minute, Dar-jim." Digger took time for a sip. "That tribe is 'way up in the Trinity's. Yellow Jacket got himself a half-hundred warriors what can outfight any white outfit he's met. Yew really want somethin' that smells? I got a dog that'll chase it out anytime yore interested."

"If it is something of the kind you were wearing..." Began Dairjean.

"Yep. Same stuff," snorted Digger. "Smells like it come right out of a cougars stomach."

"Aha! Ambergis from the animal." The Frenchman's small face became studious then eagerly, he agreed. "We will investigate. The Wamoltani will wait."

A mutter, and the sound of a heavy body stirring, caused Digger John to gulp his drink and whisper. "Get over to that adobe across the street whilst I arrange for an outfit. Dredger Dan's comin' outa his nap."

"But why?" Began Dairjean.

"Because I said so," snarled Digger. "If I'm workin' for yew, then do what I tell yew. Get on over to the Adobe. I'll get yore belongings outa the room." He hurried up the stairs and the Frenchman moved reluctantly toward the doors.

WHEN DIGGER clumped back down the stairs with the perfume-case, Dredger was blankly wiping the bar with the heavy bungstarter. His eyes were glazed and he mouthed his words like his mouth was filled with marbles. "Fella sure was fast with his feet." Then his eyes focused and narrowed. "Where'd he go?"

"Trinity County," answered Digger. Gently, he reached over and took the bungstarter out of Dredger's hand and shoved the bar-towel where the still dazed man could reach it. Quickly, he left the bar-room, holding the sample-case at arms' length.

Before the hour was gone, Digger and Dairjean were well out on the far side of Cold Spring Mountain. The burros were loaded neatly and followed without lead ropes.

"It is the odor that is so puzzling," began Dairjean as he minced along in front of the miner.

"Like washing goatskin pants in lye?" Digger muttered. "That's the burros; they smell good all the time."

"The dog. You could not find him?"

"Nope. He's out on his own but I know where there's more skunks than he does. We'll have a couple dozen 'fore the day's out. Just keep spreading that oil of Musk, as yew call it. A drop every hundred foot an' them little black animals'll be trackin' *us* 'fore night. We just had one heavy rain; everythin's clean, washed all the smells away."

"It is good. But why are we avoiding all the dwellings?" Dairjean pointed toward a two storey building that lay back from a rutted road.

"That's Benson's twelve mile house, a stage stop. Skunks never stay 'round his place; he smells worse'n they do."

"Le skunk, you say, is a large animal?"

"The skunk is a black an' white bundle of fur, built 'round a powerful smell," Digger answered solemnly. "You gotta meet 'em to know 'em. But cut out the jawin' an' let's get movin' on; we're a long ways off."

The black-headed miner set a steady pace over the rough mountain trail. He flicked the buckbrush limbs away from his shoulders, with the experience hand of a trail blazer. Dairjean took the backlash. Digger led the man deep into Bugger Canyon, then climbed the rim and followed the American River Channel for miles. The sun set and Digger hobbled his burros and cooked supper. The trees whipped in a sudden wind

and huge grey clouds gathered over the summit and let down a pillow of snow. The two men huddled under the wet blankets until the mountain man finally got to his feet and started throwing their equipment together.

"We'll need some protection. Lower down we might find a miner's shack, or a tunnel, maybe. We'd freeze in this wind 'fore mornin'."

Dairjean shook with the cold. He wrapped a blanket around his thin shoulders and plodded along behind the burros. One burro drifted off trail and Digger stepped aside to bring it back just as Dairjean stepped out ahead. Digger heard him shout. "A tunnel is here. I will explore..." He disappeared into the maw. The burros reared and fought Digger's strong hand on the hackamore.

"Get outa that cave, yew danged fool! Grizzly bears use those caves..."

HIS SHOUT was too late. The growlings that emitted from the tunnel mixed with the shouted french oaths of a man in mortal combat. Digger John loosed his sharps rifle from the burro pack and entered the cave, cursing. Deep in the moist rocky place, he could hear the animal snarl and the man's voice raised in a fighting scream.

Spotting red-reflected eyes, eight feet off the ground, Digger fired. The sound caromed about the walls and the smoke from the sharps rose in the sudden stillness. Digger John felt his way forward and struck a Chinee match. A grizzly, the size of a bull-ox, lay dead, slumped against the wall like an old man taking a nap. Chewed, torn, and spit out, was Dairjean. Blood seeped from the white shirt front; a red gash was torn from his scalp; one leg was bent at the knee, as if the bear had used his leg for a rachet.

With stubby fingers, Digger loosed Dairjean's teeth from the perforated tongue, gently released a snap-blade knife from the little Frenchman's hand, and pulled the blade from the Grizzly's chest.

With a tinge of jealous admiration in his voice, Digger spoke. "Tryin' to whip a grizzly with a pocket-knife, tch, tch!" His throat felt swollen with pity as he gently straightened the broken leg.

Dairjean's eyes flew open and his small hands dug into the dirt of the floor. He essayed a smile. "Thees is not the skunk, Dig-gair?"

"Nope, partner. This animal is fur surroundin' nothin' but plain meanness; yew don't hunt grizzlies with a pocket knife. Sit tight an I'll bring in the blankets. We'll be here for a spell. Snowin' an' blowin' outdoors like winter's set in. The first storm lasts 'bout a week."

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The snow continued. It whirled off the summit and forced it's way into the canyons. The trees cracked under its weight. Animals left the high flats and dashed down the canyons where the cougars waited. The third day of the storm drove the river miners out of the canyons and into Gold Run. They clustered in the warm saloon and piled the gold on Dredger's oak bar. He raked it in greedily, but with one eye on the swinging doors. His mouth was still sore and repeated one question over and over.

"Seen Digger John, two burros, and a Frenchman?"

Several search-parties poked around the back of Cold Spring Mountain but returned with half-frozen hands and a heavy thirst. The fifth day passed, and the snow leaned against the buildings and slid off the steep roofs. The wind stopped and a weak sun tried to warm the earth but the white crust threw its rays back until the hard-packed snow lay without heat, like frozen crystal.

With the sun's appearance, Dredger readied for action. He sent the swamper through the streets calling the men to-

gether. Muffled in a heavy mackinaw, tight boots laced to his shivering knees, Dredger mounted the water trough and shouted to the assembled men.

"He's lost in the mountains. Digger's out there in that mess, maybe with a busted leg or somethin'. He's got a crazy Frenchman on his hands an' a coupl'a burros. He *could* eat the burros, but he won't, 'cause he's jest that stupid. The Frenchman's too skinny to eat, so we gotta get out an' find Digger John."

"Why?" shouted storekeeper Black. "He owe yew money like he does me?"

"That's a good reason," yelled back Dredger, "but if *yew* was out there, the fust one on the trail would be Digger John. Now, let's set up a pattern for the search. Black, yew take five men and circle Cold Spring. Go by Benson's an' see if they know anythin'. Slim Deakins, take five more an' head down Canyon Creek, go as far as the American River. I'll take the rest an' we'll start down the stage road an' drop off a coupl'a men ever' half mile. Ever' man stop by the saloon an' take a quart of likker. The cook'll fill a sack with cooked meat an' hard bread. Ever'body stay out one day, then report back here."

THE MEN scattered and headed toward the chilly mountains. The brown, skunk-chasing, dog joined Dredger Dan's crew and padded in the broad footsteps of the hotel man. Without success, Dredger tried to drive it off. The dog finally hurried ahead and sniffed; then yowled and with high gallops that took him over the snow, headed off toward Bugger Canyon.

"He's found a skunk-track," Dredger muttered to a companion. "If I thought Digger was froze dead, I'd take a shot at that dog. Tell yew what," he directed his party, "go on down the road an' branch off. I'm goin' to follow that danged dog."

"Don't yew want we should go along, Dredger?" questioned Ed Reilly.

"Nope," grunted Dredger Dan and plunged off into the dog tracks.

Reilly grinned. "Listen for a shot; Dredger ain't foolin' nobody."

The men waited and soon the echo of a rifle shot snapped over the hills. The search-party shrugged and plodded on.

Dredger stamped deeper off the trail. The dog had flashed behind a manzanita bush and the bullet had missed. He followed and the dog poised on a high rock, waiting. Dredger fired again; saw the dog half-leap into the air, then with a yelp of pain, crawl away. Dredger smiled and hurried on. He found the path of the dog; it was outlined by a drip of blood a few yards apart. It followed the rim of the canyon that held the American River, and ended at the cave where Dairjean had found the grizzly. Without a second's thought, Dredger entered the cave. He stopped, halfway in and halted.

A fire was going. The Frenchman was propped against the wall, leaning against his sample case, his braced leg tied stiffly to thumb thick branches. A huge haunch of bear-meat dripped fat into the fire from a homemade spit. Two fat burros stomped nervously at the back of the cave. Digger John squatted over the wounded dog, wrapping a strip of Dairjean's white shirt around the brown body. The wet mark of the dog's tongue glinted in the reflected firelight on Digger's hairy forearm.

Digger looked up. His eyes looked black under the heavy brows. He stared at Dredger Dan and then let his eyes move over the gun. Slowly, he rose, his shadow grew until it blacked out the dead bear. He moved forward, and Dredger Dan turned to run. He was too late; Digger's angry hands raised the fat man and shook him. The rifle clattered on the rocky floor of the cave. Dairjean leaned back against the wall and smiled as the blubbering moans leaked from Dredger's recently battered mouth.

"Le Skunk, he has arrive. No, Diggair?"

Dredger's screams of fear turned into pleas. "The dog ain't dead. . . don't kill me for woundin' a dog. . . I'll do anythin'. . . the searchparty will know. . ."

Digger stopped shaking him. "Where are they; close?"

With stumbling, hurried words, Dredger Dan explained the details of the search party. "Then go back an' lead them here!" growled the still angry Digger. "I'll get Dar-jim ready to travel. We'll take up yore punishment when we get back to Gold Run." Without waiting for further instructions, Dredger turned and, pulling his now-tattered mackinaw together around his plump form, sped out of the cave.

THE BROWN dog rose to its feet and growling, began to advance stifflegged toward the entrance. Dredger Dan hurried back into the cave like he had been caught in a revolving door. The patent-leather nose of a big skunk followed the hotel-man. Nose down, tail up, it ignored the dog and headed straight for the Frenchman.

"Dredger!" shouted the miner; "grab that skunk by the tail!"

Dredger hastily obeyed, swooping the animal waist high while it clawed at his leg. "What'll I do with it now?" moaned the fat man.

"Just hold it," Digger said benignly. He collared the dog and turned to Dairjean. "Keep a skunk's feet off'n the ground an' they don't do one bit of harm, 'ceptin' maybe bite or claw yew; but that ain't a bit bad to what they *can* do."

"Now, Dredger!" Digger shot the words, "Dar-jim, the burros, an' this dog, is leavin' with me. We'll follow yore tracks back to the search party. Guess I can heft Dar-jim that far." In a few minutes, he had Dairjean on a burro, the wounded but struggling dog under his arm; and Dredger was left facing the flaring fire, deep underground, holding a furious, clawing skunk.

Back in Gold Run, the rescue parties straggled in. Dredger's saloon was crammed to the walls with coated men. Dairjean rested comfortably on the green-topped poker table and watched the gathering with wide eyes. His thin white hands held the dog and it lay against his chest, burrowing its nose, eyes closed in an estatic moment as he sniffed the pleasant perfume with the small huffs of a suction-hose.

"Now you all know." Digger was standing on a stool propped against the whiskey barrel. He waved his tin cup, caught the grin on Dairjean's face. "Dredger plugged my dog after that dog had followed Dar-jim's scent through three foot of snow to where we was holed up in that grizzlies cave. Shootin' that kind of dog is a mighty bad thing. We figured that leavin' Dredger in the cave, with a skunk, was sufficient punishment." The crowd whooped and a man in the back shouted drunkenly.

"How long can he hold the critter?" Silence filled the room as the men listened for the answer. But boots, crunching through the snow on the boardwalk, caused necks to stiffen. Listeners knew such deliberate steps usually meant trouble. It came with the gleefully taunting voice of the bar and hotel owner, who had obviously heard the shouted question.

"He can hold it 'til right now!" The batwings opened and a black body with a wide white stripe down its back flew into the room.

The brown dog reared and charged the defiant animal. Digger John tried to climb the wall but was trampled by the men leaving through the kitchen doorway. A pungent odor filled the room, mixed with the angry growls and snapping of the skunk and dog.

Dairjean leaned on his elbow and sniffed the air. He clawed a handkerchief from his coat tail pocket and muttered professionally. "The scent, in it's natural state, will *not* sell. Even to a French gentleman."

★

RIDE OUT TO DOOM!

(*continued from page 29*)

"Fair and square," he said. "That is a break yore boss would never give."

"He's not yellow," Gordon answered, but there was no heat in his denial; it was simple statement.

"Not yella, mebbe, but can't stand to take a licking," Wirt wheezed. "And on account of he can't stand it, he don't ever risk it. He has to give it jist to prove hisself the better man."

Hoofbeats were drumming out of the trail behind them; a twist went over the outlaw's mouth and then he sucked a throbbing breath and stilled with death. Billings and a group came riding up and hit dirt pounding across the distance.

"Gawdamighty!" Billings growled, cutting sign against the facts of what he'd seen earlier that morning. "That's Wirt, the sneaking hoss-thief!"

"Hoss-thief, mebbe, but a square one," Gordon allowed.

He didn't hear the swirl of skirts; he just heard Billings grunting on, "Still a hoss-thief. You didn't have to take that chance. You thirsted loco?"

He didn't answer for the sudden feel of Dixie's hands upon his wounded arm. "Not loco. Human," she answered Billings. The feel of her hands was sure and gentle on his arm. But nothing as sure and gentle, and proud...damn him but she was proud! ...in the light the damp eyes she lifted up to him.

★

STACKED DECK

Feature Novelet Of Boothill Greed

Avery knew that Lew Beckett hated him, was trying to drive him away; but he didn't realize how serious the situation was, until the trap had been sprung . . .

by D. L. Bonar

THEY WERE waiting for him when he drove into the yard. Two saddled horses browsed, with trailing reins, in a patch of grass below the cabin. And two men rose from a bench in front of it, casting aside half-smoked cigarettes, as he pulled his team to a halt.

An unpleasant tingle swept up Dan Avery's back. Lew Beckett would pay no friendly call here—especially accompanied by Al Corb. Casting a glance at a sunset flaming sky, Dan wished he had stayed with his fencing until dark, as usual; he wished he had at least investigated the stench that had been waited to his nostrils as he'd passed the mouth of

Dutchman's Draw.

There were deep prospect-holes in the vicinity of the abandoned old mine; some critter had plainly fallen into one of them and died. If having just safely counted his own thirty-odd head hadn't prompted him to put off an investigation until tomorrow, his arrival home might have been delayed long enough...

"Get down!" said Beckett, strutting forward.

And Dan saw the futility of his regrets. No matter how late he'd come in, they would still have been here. Whatever Lew Beckett started he finished, with no swerving aside, no delays; that was one of his boasts. At thirty, he had inherited the Broken Box, biggest, richest spread in the country. He thought he owned the earth as well, and he showed it with an air of hard arrogance that was as much his habitual garb as hand-made boots, California pants, silk shirts, and fifty-dollar Stetsons.

"Get down!" he repeated testily, as Dan remained motionless on the wagon seat, regarding him with steady blue eyes. "Got a few things to say to you!"

"Such as?"

"Keep away from the Slash W tonight! Don't try crashing Della's party because word's been passed around that everyone's welcome; that don't include the likes o' you!"

Dan felt the short hairs at the back of his neck lift. He said, "Did Jeb Wright send you over to tell me that? Or is it your own idea?"

Beckett slapped gloves against thigh impatiently. "It's *my* idea," he admitted. "Jeb doesn't figure you'd have that much gall; he hasn't heard the rumor yet about you and Della meeting secretly. I haven't been able to trace it down, but I do aim to stop it. Everybody would know Della'd only be amusing herself with you, of course—having a last fling before. . ."

"That's a lie! Della's no cheap flirt!"

"Then that rumor's true! She *has* been slipping out to meet you. . .!"

The jealous rage that contorted Beckett's face apprized Dan of the craftily-baited trap into which he had fallen. Swiftly he sought an out. At all costs, Della must be protected. Beckett's right hand had closed about his gunbutt. Corb, out of range of vision to the right, would no doubt have followed suit. He could not hope to outdraw them both. Dan's only chance lay in his wits, and in the Winchester slanting against the seat beside him.

"You're a fool, Beckett!" he said. "You expect to marry Della because Old Man Wright is on your side. But how long do you think he'll stay there, if you throw mud at his daughter's good name like this?"

"I'm not; I'm protecting it. It's nothing new for a nice girl to think she's fallen for a no-good hombre, just because he happens to be curly-headed and handsome. It's nothing new for her to get over him, either, as soon as he's run off like he deserves. That's the chore I'm takin' over. Pack up and get out of the country, Avery! Drift—while you can!"

"Just like that?" said Dan grimly.

"Just like that!"

FOR A LONG moment gaze stabbed gaze, while blood ran hot with the age-old rivalry of men for a woman. Then Dan shrugged. "I've homesteaded this land. You can't run me off and make it stick; you're a few years too late to get away with that kind of high-handedness."

"Not when I'm dealing with a rustler!" Beckett flung back triumphantly. "Not when I've taken the biggest loss of all so far! Broken Box is missing fifty prime steers!"

Somehow Dan managed to ignore the jolt the announcement gave him. "You got any evidence to prove I took 'em?" he demanded.

"The kind that would stand up in court? No. If I had you wouldn't be getting off with just a warning. But everybody knows where these missing steers are going; everybody knows you're tied in with the Tully gang. And, proof or not, something's going to be done about it damn soon unless you get smart and drift! Mark my words, Avery. . .!"

His voice droned on, pompous, sure, contemptuous. *Like he's the lord of creation and I'm a belly-crawlin' cur. . .* ripped through Dan's mind. And abruptly the heat that had been building up inside exploded into a red blaze of fury.

"I've taken enough of your dirt!" he gritted. *"Git!"* And he snatched up the rifle.

Half-lifted, a roar and streak of flame from the right tore it from his grasp. Momentarily numb with shock, Dan heard the rifle-barrel clank against the iron rim of the wagon wheel before the weapon plopped to the ground. The team shied and snorted, but did not bolt. Dan had fired over their heads at too many coyotes for them to be very gun shy.

"Get down before I drop you, too!" commanded Corb. "And shuck that hogleg!"

He had not merely put hand upon his gunbutt as had Beckett a moment ago; he had drawn the .45 and held it in readiness. He waited until Dan tossed down his sixgun, wrapped lines about brake lever and dropped to the ground. Then he holstered his gun and shambled forward, licking his lips.

"Now this is nice!" he exulted. "Real nice!"

Though he was handy with a sixgun, it was not his preferred weapon. Al Corb stood six feet four and his two hundred forty pounds were solid bone and muscle. There was not a man in the country anywhere near his size whom he had not forced to back down publicly or licked with blooody relish. He had deepset pale grey eyes; his face looked as though it had been beaten out of shape and had never returned to its normal state.

"Work him over good, Al!" snapped Beckett venomously. "Knock out his front teeth! Mark him up so no woman'll ever look at him again!"

PARTICULARLY Della Wright. The roots of Dan's hair fairly crackled; that was Beckett's real reason for coming here tonight. Aroused by a whisper of gossip, he had set out vindictively to beat and disfigure Dan Avery—break him so completely in body and spirt that he would never go near Della Wright again. There were probably no Broken Box steers missing; it would be like Beckett to concoct such a tale to hide his malicious motive and justify his action in the eyes of Jeb Wright and other ranchers. By the same token, Beckett had no intentions of taking any physical risk upon himself; he meant only to stand back and watch Corb do the gory job. Already he was withdrawing his sacred, expensively-clad person to a safe distance.

"No, you don't!" gritted Dan. With all the fury of a tiger he leaped and swung for Beckett's jaw. The blow landed with all the power of his one hundred eighty pounds behind it. Beckett's alarmed squawk choked off and he sailed through the air; as though his bones had turned to jelly he hit the ground, quivered, and then was still.

However well his vicious scheme panned out, he at least would not enjoy the spectacle; neither would his gorilla-like henchman accomplish his task unscathed.

That fierce determination helped Dan to cling to his senses when a mighty blow from behind sent him to his knees. Dimly, through a swirling red and black haze, he made out a pair of denim-clad legs moving in. A big booted foot drew back for a kick. Just in time Dan flung himself aside and escaped broken ribs. Corb's foot fanned empty space, throwing him off balance. As he teetered momentarily, Dan scrambled to his feet.

Corb recovered and lunged, long arms outstretched. Desperately Dan sought to dodge the powerful embrace in which he would have no chance. But Corb was quick despite his bulk; he pivoted with Dan's turn and closed a hand on the latter's left shoulder. Though his head bobbed before a right hook he did not let go. Dan hit him again and then broke free, leaving half his shirt in Corb's grasp. As though he had scarcely been touched, Corb bore in again.

"You're markin' me up, Avery!" he rasped. "Nobody's ever marked me up before; wait'll I get you down. . . !"

It was a personal issue between them now. Corb was no longer doing Beckett's bidding; this had become his own battle, through the medium of a man sixty pounds lighter holding out against him, stinging his brute pride.

"You're not getting me down if I can help it!" panted Dan, retreating step by step.

Unexpectedly he brought up hard against the wagon. With a triumphant yell Corb lunged. Dan's sideward leap crowded him into a back wheel. Trapped. The ferocity of a cornered animal burst in his brain as his oppo-

nent sought to drag him clear and throw him to the ground.

Clinging to the wheel with one hand, he slugged at Corb's face with the other. He used his teeth as his enemy's weight bore down upon him smotheringly. Corb twisted aside, howling; his hold broke. As he staggered back, Dan dipped a hand into the wagon-box, clawed unfeelingly over a roll of barbed wire and closed on a hammer.

He hurled it, saw it hit Corb's forehead and break the skin. Again Corb howled with pain, but he kept coming. A trickle of blood slid down his nose. His eyes were blazing slits. Plainly only one thought obsessed him now—to break every bone in Dan Avery's body. And Dan knew that Corb had the strength to do it.

Cold with that knowledge, Dan fell back again on the fencing tools in the wagon. He brought up a crowbar. That stopped Corb, but not for long. The holster sagging from his gunbelt was not empty. He reached for the .45, and Dan threw the bar. Corb's involuntary attempt to jump out of its path bungled his draw; the end of the heavy missile caught him on the left knee. Doubling forward, he presented a perfect target for a tin can filled with staples.

With all his might Dan hurled the object and did not miss. Staples flew in all directions; the can glanced aside. But Corb stiffened briefly in a jack-knife position then collapsed into a senseless heap.

2

FOR A LONG moment, Dan clung to the wagon-wheel, panting, savoring indescribable relief. The team had paid little attention to the fight. Through the pines behind the cabin the fiery red of the sunset was fading to a softer hue. A bird-call trilled in the quiet.

Presently Beckett stirred and began to sit up. Dan recovered his rifle, glad to find it undamaged. He removed the shells from Beckett's gun and returned the weapon to its holster. After according Corb's .45 the same treatment, he addressed the ranchman. "Your plan sort of fell through," he said.

"There'll be another time!" snarled Beckett. Disheveled, his fancy clothes grass-stained and soiled, he climbed to his feet. "This isn't over, Avery!"

"Get going!" said Dan wearily.

Beckett led up the two saddle horses. Puffing and cursing, he managed to place his burly henchman's limp bulk face downward across the back of one. Mounting the other he flung Dan a last malignant look. Taking up bridle reins, then, he rode off, leading Corb's burdened horse. Motionless, the temporary lift of relief beginning to wear off, Dan watched him out of sight.

Beckett was right; it was not over. For a bully of Corb's size to be beaten by a smaller man, regardless of means employed, would heap upon him unendurable humiliation. Corb would wake up thirsting for Dan Avery's blood, and—the worst of it was—he would run little risk of being called to account if he shed it.

Licking skinned knuckles, Dan bitterly considered his position. He had come to this country a year ago seeking land to homestead, a location where a man with a small herd and modest cash stake might build up alone. This foothill valley called High Meadow had seemed to fill every need. He had had his cabin built and his roots put down before he'd learned why this rich grass and water had remained unclaimed until his coming.

Overshadowed by the towering peaks of a mountain range, High Meadow formed a sort of natural corridor to a rough, wild region to the north, in which a notorious outlaw gang was known to hole up.

"You shouldn't of been so all-fired hasty," Jeb Wright, his first visitor,

had told him truculently; "you should of asked around a little before grabbin' the first piece of open land that looked good. Nobody's ever been able to find the Tully gang's hideout. They'll likely figure that's what you're up to—that the law planted you here to spy on 'em. If they do..."

"I'll take that chance," Dan declared.

He had already spent too much of his cash stake to move on and make another start elsewhere. Besides, this small, high valley, so rich in shades of green against a blue-black backdrop of mountains, had laid its spell upon his heart. This was home.

IT HADN'T mattered that Jeb Wright took offense at his refusal to heed and follow well-meant advice. It didn't matter that the crochety old ranchman made it plain he considered Dan Avery a stubborn young fool, who was sure to get his come-uppance.

He made friends—or thought he did. And at the first dance he'd attended, the call "Change partners" had brought into his arms a girl slim and lovely in a frock that matched her eyes and made him think of the purply lilacs his mother had loved long ago.

Della Wright. Della Wright Avery. It had a lilt and meaning he found wonderful. Della liked it too; Her father didn't.

Jeb Wright favored Lew Beckett as a son-in-law. Lew's father had been his best friend. And the arrogance that rubbed lesser people the wrong way was not distasteful to him. He had enough of it in his own make-up, the worth of the Slash W being only slightly less than that of the Broken Box. From the start he'd made it plain that Dan was none too welcome a visitor; his coolness had increased with passing time.

At last Dan learned the reason. "Red Tully wouldn't stand for nobody stayin' in High Meadow as long as you have!" Jeb Wright declared bluntly one day. "Either you're a new member of his gang planted amongst honest folks for no good purpose, or, the first time his gang showed up to run you off, you was slick enough to make some sort of deal with him!"

In vain Dan protested innocence, tried to convince him and others that he never to his knowledge so much as laid eyes on Red Tully or any of the latter's followers. Only Della believed him. And then choice steers began to disappear from Slash W graze to the south, and from Double O graze to the east. They could only have been driven northward into the mountains. Taken only a few head at a time, they would have left no tracks distinguishable from those of Dan's cattle freely ranging High Meadow.

It had the look of an ideal rustling setup. Only the fact that there was, as yet, no definite proof against him had been standing between Dan and the law—or worse. For weeks, however, he had had a queasy feeling as of standing on ground laid with a powder-charge. And Beckett's claim, of a new loss, true or false, could be just the spark to set it off.

FILLED with foreboding, Dan put up his team and hurried through chores. Even so, darkness had fallen

by the time he went to the cabin to force down a cup of coffee and a cold biscuit-bacon sandwich. He could no longer stand still and hope, awaiting developments. He had to do something to try to save himself. And he could see only one chance.

After shaving he changed into his best clothes. Briefly he fingered a small ribbon-tied package—Della's birthday present—then put it in his coat pocket and sat down to clean and re-load his sixgun. At length he blew out the lamp, saddled a leggy roan and, mounting, headed south.

It was a night of clear skies with a full moon spreading a circle of luminous mist that dimmed the brilliance of countless stars. Small animals scuttled out of his path into brush, causing his mount to shy and snort. A tang of sage blended into the redolence of pine, cedar and juniper as he dropped down through the hills toward the black, comparatively level floor of a vast basin. Far out on it a cluster of bright pinpoints marked the town of Gunlock. Few lights, however, shone from widely-scattered ranch house windows. By this time of evening, practically everyone would be at Slash W, or heading that way.

Della had promised to try to slip outside at ten o'clock. It was close to that hour when Dan circled eastward to dismount and tether his roan securely at the foot of a timbered knoll. With a rollicking harmony of fiddle and accordion growing loud in his ears he climbed the gentle eminence and worked his way down the other side.

Rigs and saddle horses crowded the Slash W yard. Inside the picket fence setting the house apart, male figures swarmed exuberantly about a barrel elevated on a pair of sawbucks. Lights shone from every window. Past those of the big livingroom dancing couples bobbed and whirled. Others strolled about or lingered on the vine-shaded veranda.

Through the windows of the kitchen Dan could see the older women bustling about a long table laden with party fare. In its center stood a white-frosted, candle-crowned cake that looked three feet around and two feet high. The cake gossip had claimed Jeb Wright was sending clear to Circle City for, special made. His birthday gift to Della was reputed to be a string of genuine matched pearls. Every year, especially since she had reached marriageable age, these parties were said to have grown bigger and more lavish.

"It's not that Ol' Jeb likes to spend money so free," a Bar Three waddy had remarked mournfully in Dan's hearing one day. "He does it to discourage courtin' notions in the likes o' me—to remind us we ain't in Della's class."

And maybe he was right. The futility of his two greatest hopes—to clear himself and to make Della Wright his wife—began to bear down upon Dan sickeningly. And then a slim white figure flitted from a corner of the house across an expanse of moonlight, and into the shadows of the timber patch.

"Dan!" came a soft, urgent call. "Dan?"

"Here!" He stepped forward with the word. She came running to throw herself into his arms, and as swiftly as that the weight of hopelessness left

him. For she was no delicate, silken-clad princess to worship from afar, but a sturdy, flesh-and-blood girl exuding a clean soap-and-water fragrance—a ranch girl, who could make a capable range hand in a pinch, milk a cow, or pack a bucket of water as a matter of course. All this, and more, she had learned to do while Jeb Wright was building up the wealth that meant so much to him now. And that wealth hadn't changed her simple forthrightness.

"Dan!" she repeated. "I thought... I was afraid you wouldn't come tonight. Lew Beckett..."

EVERYTHING seemed to pause. Then Dan said slowly, "So he's here shooting off his mouth about missing steers. I didn't think he'd raise a rumpus about it tonight—spoil your party."

"He didn't. He just called Dad and some of the other ranchers together. I saw them go into the office. I knew something was up so I—I eavesdropped. Sam Woods said he didn't aim to wait for the Double O to get hit again; he was all for vigilante action against you. A few agreed, but Lew put the idea down; he argued they'd be crazy to get themselves in bad with the law. Anyway, you were just a small part of the setup. To smash it they'd have to smash the Tully gang, too. Dad backed him up. Someone came along then and I had to leave, so I don't know what they did finally decide. But I'm afraid, Dan—afraid...!"

His arms tightened comfortably about her. His mind, however, attacked a new puzzle. He would have thought Beckett would jump at a chance to have other ranchers help with and share the responsibility of disposing of Dan Avery by any method. He would have thought Beckett would make every effort to bring that about. Why, then, had the latter talked against the idea of a lynching party? Had he merely been running a bluff? Or...

The snap of a twig in the darkness behind Della brought Dan's head up alertly. Della had heard it, too. He felt her stiffen. Quickly he disengaged himself. Hand on gunbutt, he said lowly, "Who's there?"

No one answered. The strains of a polka swelled on the air.

"Probably a rabbit," said Della. "I'd better get back, though, before I'm missed. But first—what are we going to do, Dan? What are we going to do?"

The "we" loosed a flood of tenderness in him. Putting an arm about her slim waist, he walked with her to the edge of the timber, pausing in a patch of brightness to tilt her face up to the moonlight filtering through thinning branches. Her blue eyes looked wide and black. Soberness brought out the fine chiseling of her features, but her mouth was both sweet and firm with corners that did not droop. He touched a finger to the softness of her cheek.

"You're just going to sit tight," he said. "And don't believe anything you hear without proof. I'm going away a while."

"Away! Dan..."

"I've thought it all out," he interrupted, hoping he'd be able to make his plan sound simple and matter-of-fact. "I've got to prove I haven't been helping the Tully gang rustle those steers—that I have no connections with them whatever. The only way I can do that is to find their hideout—try to bring in Tully, or one of his boys, and make them talk."

She clutched at him. "Even the sheriff won't ride into those mountains alone! If you try it, you'll never come back!"

"Yes, I will. Somehow. That's a promise, Della!"

HE HAD tried to say it convincingly for her sake. For himself he knew just how slim were his chances of success. He admitted that he might be a fool to even hope to accomplish alone something posses had failed to do. Yet, if he wished to keep on living

and outside prison bars, the only other alternative was to pull out of the country. He would be a bigger fool to turn his back on what he had here in High Meadow and on a girl like Della without a fight. And anyone who ran away, even from seemingly hopeless odds, was always the biggest fool of all, for in turning coward or quitter he lost infinitely more than he saved.

"When are you leaving?" Della had the kind of courage he'd been banking on, too.

"Tonight." A hundred things he wanted to tell her crowded his throat, then, and rendered him unable to speak. Silence grew unbearable. In the moonlight he caught the sparkle of a tear on her cheek. Casting about in desperation, he recalled the ribbon-tied package in his pocket and brought it forth eagerly.

"Here's your birthday present, honey. I almost forgot. It's only a gold-plated locket—don't amount to much..."

"Oh, Dan!" With a choking cry she threw her arms about his neck. Straining to each other, their lips met with the fierce passion of lovers' goodbye, which is composed of pain and fear as much as hunger. They shared a moment of near heaven and hell. And then a harsh voice barked nearby. "Turn her loose, Avery!"

3

SLOWLY, half befuddled, the muscles of Dan's arms relaxed. Della whipped about. Her father stepped from the wall of blackness to the left and confronted them in the semi-darkness of moonlight dappled shadow.

Jeb Wright was not a big man, but he carried himself like one. He had learned to wear fine broadcloth suits and white shirts with an air of elegance. Yet acquired refinement could not erase the old-time cattleman look from his face, all bony ridges and sunken planes; nor could it soften the work-gnarled hands, one holding a six-gun hip-high and leveled.

"I had to see for myself before I'd believe! Then I thought I could hold in—settle with this young skunk at a better time. But when you throwed yourself at him like a hussy...!" He strangled, fought to breathe.

"That's not true!" cried Dan, aghast. "Della's fine and good...!"

"And I aim to keep her that way! Get to the house, girl!"

"Only if you come with me!" Della's chin went up.

Jeb Wright jerked as though she had slapped him. "You're standing up for this—this...!"

"We're in love, Dad, and we want to get married! Please try to understand!"

Dan expected a shattering explosion. Instead the old ranchman's reply came in a low, tight voice that was infinitely worse. "I understand you've had too free a rein and it's time to pull it up. At supper I'm going to announce your engagement to Lew. You're going to marry him as soon as proper arrangements can be made!"

"No!" Dan almost jumped. For a heartsinking moment it had seemed that any girl must wilt before such a blast of paternal wrath. He had forgotten that Della Wright was her father's daughter, that in her, too, there would be steel from which to strike sparks. She faced her father, white-faced and far from calm. But she faced him.

"I'll deny any such announcement you make!" she said. "You've forgotten the number of candles on that birthday cake. Twenty-one. You can't force me into anything. You're my father and I'll respect your judgment—follow your advice in a lot of things—but not this. You can put me out... disown me..."

"Della!" She had shocked away the old man's anger. The amazed pain in his voice stabbed Dan deeply. For the

first time he realized Jeb Wright's attitude was not entirely unjustified—saw that he was not all selfishness, stubborn blindness, and arrogance. Mostly he was a father sincerely striving for what he believed best for a beloved and only girl child.

Straightening his shoulders, Dan stepped clear of Della. "I'm sorry it came to this," he said, "and I don't blame you for feeling like you do. I'd want to shoot any man under a cloud who met my daughter secretly at night, too. I just didn't see it like that until now. I didn't realize I was doing Della wrong, and I promise it'll never happen again. I'll stay away from her until I'm cleared and can court her openly, the right way. Goodnight, sir; goodnight, Della."

She uttered a protesting cry as he turned away But she did not run after him and he thought her father must have held her back. Though nerves tightened and shrieked he was not surprised that the old ranchman let him go, making no use of the gun in his hand. Regardless of provocation Jeb Wright wasn't the back-shooting kind; neither was he as hellbent on having his own way, as Dan had believed him. Put to a rigid enough test, that trait would give way before love for his daughter.

"If I can clear myself, he'll give in," Dan soliloquized, riding homeward. "He wants Della to be safe and happy."

CHEERED by this new revelation, the scheme he had decided upon sudenly took on a new glow of hope. In better spirits than had been his for days he rode into High Meadow eventually, to pause and drink in its moon-drenched beauty.

His log cabin, log barn and modest spread of corrals were a far cry from the pretentious Slash W. But any young couple could be comfortable and happy here, and good years would make possible a big house with plenty of room for a family.

With difficulty Dan put dreaming aside. He would need a blanket and supply of grub for his trek into the mountains. And he had better change his saddle to old Speck, who was tougher and longer-winded than the roan, though not so fast. Passing the corrals, he made for the small horse pasture nearby from which to run in the desired re-mount. The gate was of wire and staves, recently repaired and tightened and not to be opened from the saddle. Unaware of this, the bushwhacker cut loose just as Dan swung to the ground.

The blast was loud and near. Lead zipped past Dan in the barest of misses. His roan whinnied and went up in the air, fore feet flailing. The gun roared again as Dan hit the ground, rolling over and over, the while clawing out his own Colt. He was in the open, a target pitilessly exposed by moonlight. His only chance was to keep moving. He did so, punctuating each frantic scramble with a shot at the orange flashes marking the bushwhacker's position in the shadows fringing a near corral fence.

Those shadows, which should have been the bushwhacker's security, proved his downfall instead, for they inspired over-confidence. In place of throwing himself to right or left after each shot as a more astute ambusher would have done—he remained in one spot, concentrating on the effort of bringing his swift-moving prey to halt.

Dan felt the sting of dirt kicked into his face by one bullet; he felt the fiery bite of another at a shoulder-tip. But inevitably one of the slugs he he poured at a stationary target at

last found its mark. He had no idea of the number of shots exhanged. When the enemy fire ceased abruptly, his first thought was that the bushwhacker had emptied his gun. It seemed incredible that he should have dodged that many bullets.

And then he knew he hadn't. For out of shrouding darkness a figure appeared, lurching into the open, hands clutching its chest. It took two jerky steps went down to its knees and then flattened out.

Its size told Dan who it was before he turned it over. Al Corb. For the second time Beckett's henchman had gambled too big on a seeming sure thing. He would never do so again; he was dead.

Pretty soon he'd turn cold and sick over having killed a man, thought Dan. At present he could only feel relieved and glad that he was not the corpse sprawled upon the ground. And he could only feel a deep, burning rage for the narrowness of his escape and the ruthlessness of the man responsible for it.

He knew now why Beckett had talked against a lynching—because he'd already arranged for this quicker, surer way of removing a hated rival. This way he could stay completely out of the picture. How could anyone suspect him of having had Dan Avery bushwhacked on the very night he had taken so vigorous a stand against resorting to violence? Corb paid off his grudge. And the death of a believed rustler could be conveniently laid to a quarrel with his supposed accomplices, the Tully gang.

Dan's jaw tightened. Beckett's scheme had backfired...

But not disastrously. The sudden realization chilled Dan. He was worse off; now he could be charged with murder. Beckett could, and would, claim he had sent Corb here only to watch him. He'd say Dan had fired shots out of Corb's gun himself, in order to back up his tale of self-defense.

DAN BEGAN to sweat, in imagination feeling a rope tighten about his neck. So long as he was believed to be a rustler associate of the Tully gang, his word would be worth nothing at all. If only he might clear himself of that charge before this new one came up...Dan's breath caught in his throat. That was it. The only out, and again a desperate one. If he could prove they had been wrong about him *before* anyone learned of Corb's death, he might come out all right. At least the strength of his alleged motive for murdering Corb would be considerably shaken. And as an innocent man, already recently wronged by undeserved suspicion and censure, his word would be bound to bear weight.

Heart thudding crazily, Dan looked down at the corpse. No matter where it was found, the blame would be laid at his door. Beckett would see to that. Only if it were not found, would his hands be tied. A bleak smile touched Dan's lips as he pictured Beckett's frustration at the disappearance of his hireling. How it would eat upon him to guess what had happened to Corb, and yet be unable to prove it!

Hide the body, then. But where? For the first time Dan became aware of blood trickling down his arm wetting his left sleeve. Gingerly he examined a shallow groove across the top of his shoulder. Nothing much, but it would probably stiffen his arm, making grave-digging an awkward, painful task. Anyway, a grave nearby was too apt to be found, and he had no wish to pack the body into the mountains with him. The quicker it was temporarily

disposed of, the better would be his chances.

Some sort of natural hiding place would be best. A cave or... "The Dutchman!" exclaimed Dan aloud. The entrance of the old mine tunnel had been pretty well covered over with debris and brush the last time he'd seen it. Its timbers were probably in bad shape, too. But the danger of penetrating it would make it all the more a perfect place for Corb's body to rest until the truth might be told and the corpse removed for decent burial.

Dan's horse had not bolted far. Catching it reminded him that Corb would also have a mount somwhere in the vicinity. A brief search located a Broken Box sorrel behind the barn. Dan loaded the corpse on it, not without painful effort. Grudgingly, then, he took time to bind a handkerchief over his slight wound. Mounting, he started out.

Corb's riding gear he would hide with the body. The sorrel could be turned loose to make its way back to Broken Box range. Should Beckett, or anyone else, recall having last seen Corb riding that particular horse, the animal's return in that fashion would merely deepen their mystification.

IT WAS A two-hour ride to the Dutchman's Draw, far beyond the boundary of Dan's homestead. Inside his legal fence he had plowed and put in crop. His stock grazed the unclaimed upper reaches of High Meadow, where he had been working on a drift fence to keep them out of the hills. Before reaching that fence he turned west. Soon his nostrils curled with an odor that came and went on a shifting breeze.

Carrion. He forged on. The odor gained strength. Something was not only dead but had been dead for some time. And it was nothing that had fallen into a prospect hole.

Halting, and holding a tight rein on horses making plain their dislike of the horror in the air, Dan stared at the entrance of the old mine, forced to accept the fact that the stench came from there. And yet how would any animal have made its own way inside? A small landslide had completely blocked the entrance, save perhaps for a few small open spaces between rocks at the top.

Dan dismounted and tethered the horses securely to a juniper. He climbed the heap of rubble. Rolling aside a couple of rocks uncovered a sizable opening. The blast of air that rushed out caused him to whip aside, gagging. But there was no turning back now. Dan lifted his neckerchief to cover mouth and nose. Making sure of matches in his pocket, he set his his teeth and crawled inside.

Loose gravel moved with him. A trickle of dirt from the roof slid down the back of his neck. The fear of a cave-in, burying him alive, turned him cold and clammy. But he struck a match and moved on into the tunnel.

Fortunately he had not far to go. Unbelievingly he struck another match, and another. Then he turned and stumbled back the way he had come. In the open once more he moved automatically up wind. There he flung himself upon the ground and pressed his face into cool mountain grass, while the upheaval in his outraged stomach slowly quieted.

He had underestimated Lew Beckett. Not only had the Broken Box owner sought to turn the suspicion of rustling against a rival to his own advantage; he had created that suspicion. And he'd have gotten away with it but for one thing—the driving haste and impatience with which he habitually went after anything he wanted. By sending Corb back so soon to make an end of Dan Avery, once and for all, he had prevented Dan from going off

on a perilous wild goose chase from which he might never have returned; he had defeated himself.

The irony of it gave Dan an eerie feeling. No need now to waste further time and thought on the Tully gang. No need now to hide Corb's body.

Mounting and leading the burdened sorrel once more, Dan turned grimly back the way he had come. It was a relief to breathe untainted air again. As the miles fell behind, the throbbing ache of his shallow wound increased. By the time he reached his buildings the hours spent in the saddle after a hard day's work were beginning to take their toll.

Yet neither fatigue nor physical discomfort could stop him. By pressing on steadily he might reach the Slash W before daylight, before the party there broke up. And the bigger the gathering to which he might expose Lew Beckett's treachery, the better.

THE LIGHTENING of the eastern sky before he reached his destination was no welcome sight. It was with keen disappointment that he found the Slash W yard no longer crowded with rigs. Only one saddle horse remained, standing with drooping head outside the picket fence. The air carried no sound of music and gay voices. The bunkhouse was dark. All lights in the ranch house were out, save one. Dan had been inside enough to know that the illumined window marked Jeb Wright's office.

With no break in his steady road gait Dan proceeded to the picket fence. The horse tethered there shied away from the sorrel's burden. Dan recognized it as the blooded bay Lew Beckett habitually rode. As a favorite of Jeb Wright's it seemed reasonable that the Broken Box owner should have lingered after the departure of the other guests for a last drink or companionable chat. Or were the two discussing a means of overcoming Della's opposition to their mutual plan for her future?

It was neither. As Dan mounted the steps to the veranda a sound of loud voices reached his ears. Since it was a warm night, the inner front door stood open. There was a screen door, unlatched. Lifting a hand to knock, Dan hesitated. Curiosity got the better of him. He had never known that Lew Beckett and Jeb Wright quarreled. But they certainly seemed to be doing so now.

Entering, Dan made his way down a shadow-dark hall to a closed door marked by a line of yellow at the bottom. Words that had grown intelligible as he drew near rang through the panel.

"It's crazy to say just forget it!" Jeb Wright was declaring in exasperation. "This is too serious a matter for anything to be left in doubt. I can understand you not having any love for Avery, Lew. But to deliberately blind yourself..."

"I'm not! You're the one who's going soft because Della's getting around you. If you weren't, you'd see as plain as I do that Tully lied!"

"But he had no reason to!"

"That's a matter of opinion. I say..." Beckett's voice broke off as Dan sent the door swinging inward.

Only so far as drapes and a rug on the floor did Jeb Wright's office share the ornate elegance of the rest of his house. This was a room for work, not show. He had clung to a battered old desk and behind it he sat, scowling at Beckett. Arrested in the act of pacing back and forth, the latter whipped into a crouch at recognition of the unexpected caller framed in the doorway. Discretion, however, checked the motion of his hand toward gun.

"And I was thinking maybe I'd been mistaken about you!" exclaimed Jeb Wright bitterly. "Well, you'll find slim pickin's here. I bank my money!"

Dan shook his head, allowing the barrel of his .45 to slant floorward. "This ain't a stick-up; I've got something to say, and I just wanted to make sure you both listened."

The old ranchman's gaze grew speculative. "We've got a better reason to

do that than a gun held on us," he said. "Red Tully and his gang tried to rob the Express Office in town tonight. Got wind of a cash shipment and figgered it'd be an easy heist with most everyone, includin' the sheriff, out here for the party. But the marshal stuck around with double guards. Caught Tully and his boys plumb by surprise. Killed two and captured two more. Questioned 'em about you. Before he died Tully swore he didn't know a thing about any rustling in these parts—or you, either. The others back up his story—claim they've been away a whole year runnin' cattle across the border and just got back... That wipes out one mark against you. So put up that gun, if you're on the level all around!"

DAN'S HESITATION was brief. It might be safer to keep the drop on Beckett, but it would be good strategy to give him an opportunity to make a betraying break.

"Okay." He holstered the gun. Swiftly he recounted Corb's attempt to bushwhack him and all that had followed. Jeb Wright's eyes narrowed, but he did not interrupt. Beckett stood frozen until Dan told of reaching the abandoned mine and starting to investigate the stench emanating from it. There a choked exclamation broke from Beckett's lips.

The straight line of Dan's mouth curved slightly. "You know what I found there, don't you?" he said. "You started a small landslide to cover the mouth of the tunnel, but you didn't do quite a good enough job."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" blustered Beckett.

"What was in the tunnel?" demanded Jeb Wright.

Dan said, "The carcasses of the Slash W and Double O steers I'm supposed to have rustled! They've been shot and dragged in there. Beckett didn't know why the Tully gang never bothered me at High Meadow, but he sure turned it to his advantage. If I had any brains I'd have guessed the truth long ago. The rustling never started until after Della began to show she liked me..."

"He's crazy—makin' it up!" Beckett turned to the man to whom he had been so close, desperation twisting his face. "You can't believe anything like that about me, Jeb!"

The old ranchman looked a little sick. "I'm afraid I have to," he said slowly; "it all adds up to well. Avery wasn't in with the Tully gang. It don't make sense he'd bust in here with a wild tale he couldn't prove; and it's a cinch he didn't kill and hide those steers just to make trouble for himself. That had to be done by somebody who wanted him out of the way bad. You're the only one who fits that description, Lew."

"But I didn't! I..." Beckett's eyes shuttled from the face of one accuser to that of the other. What he read in each inexorable gaze seemed to convince him of the futility of further denial.

"All right!" he capitulated suddenly. "So I killed a few steers. I'll pay for yours and make it up to Sam Woods some other way. He doesn't need to know; nobody needs to know but you and me, Jeb. If Avery's killed Corb..."

"You'll try to frame him for murder, now. And you want me to help!" Outraged, the old rancher leaped to his feet. "Just how slimy a snake are you anyway?"

Beckett swung half around, hands flying to his face as though stricken with revulsion or shame. It was a phony gesture. Dan caught that and forgot it, as Beckett uncovered his face at once and gave vent to an impassioned outburst.

"It's only his word he killed Corb in self-defense! I don't believe it!" he cried. "And as for framing Avery for rustling... I had to do something! Della only thought she wanted him instead of me because he was new. I couldn't let a girl's fool whim wreck all my—our plans! You know how you and me have always looked forward to a Broken Box-Slash W combine! The biggest and best ranch in the West...!"

"And with my grandson and namesake owning the whole works someday!" broke in the other, flushing. "With a Jeb Wright Beckett runnin' the State—maybe even sittin' in the Governor's chair! Yeah. I'm partly to blame. I talked too big—got to feelin' too big. Wanted to leave my mark in the world after I'd passed on. That was a mighty important dream to me, Lew. But I can't pay for it with an innocent man's life!"

"Then pay for it with your own!" screeched Beckett.

HE PIVOTED from his half-turned position, fire streaking from his right hip. Even as Dan went down before the solid slam of a bullet, he realized dimly what had happened. That phony gesture had been a ruse to turn Beckett's right side away. While claiming their attention with impassioned speech, he had closed his hand on his gunbutt. Then he had simply spun about and fired through the open end of his holster.

The pile of the rug felt rough to Dan's cheek. Through a mist that deepened and cleared erratically he heard Beckett's voice.

"...kill you now with his gun. I'll be rid of you both and no one the wiser..."

A shadow moved between Dan and the light. It was Beckett, bending to pick up Dan's gun while holding Jeb Wright at bay with his own. A leg with trousers stuck into fancy boots loomed close. With a supreme effort Dan hooked an arm about it and flopped his body over.

Confusion resulted. Gunfire. Yells. Crashes and bangs of a furniture-wrecking struggle. Another shot and then silence.

●

The next Dan knew his head was in Della's lap. In a yellow dressing gown and with her dark hair tumbled about her shoulders, she bent over him anxiously. Jeb Wright knelt on the other side.

"Thanks, son," he said huskily. "Beckett won't be makin' no more trouble for anybody else for a long time. While we was fightin' over the gun it went off. He took the bullet instead of me. This is once I'm mighty glad to be proved wrong; got a lot of makin' up for it to do..."

Dan became aware of others in the room. The bunkhouse had been aroused, of course.

"I'm going to have you carried upstairs now, Dan," said Della, bending closer. "One of the boys has already gone for the doctor. You're going to be all right, darling! You're..."

The break in her voice betrayed the fear she was trying to hide.

Dan knew there was no need for it. "Quit worryin', honey!" he told her, managing a grin. "We just beat a stacked deck, didn't we? Everything's going to be all right now!"

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OUR ERRONEOUS IDEAS OF THE INDIAN

FACTS VERSUS FICTION

by A. Hyatt Verrill

WE HAVE been dealing with, or fighting, Indians for the past three centuries and more; thousands of tourists, and others, have seen thousands of Indians of our West and Southwest; thousands of Indians have fought shoulder-to-shoulder with their white comrades in the two World Wars and in Korea; and hundreds of Indians dwell in our great cities, working at innumerable trades and professions, employed in many industries and mingling freely with the "white-skins." Yet the average white man does not recognize an Indian when he sees one.

His mental picture of an Indian is a hawk-nosed individual, grim-faced, red-skinned, attired in buckskin and wearing a so-called "war bonnet" or a upstanding "scalp lock." As a Maine Wabenaki declared when I criticised him for wearing a plains-Indian headdress, "White men won't believe I'm an Indian unless I wear a war-bonnet."

On one occasion, when I mentioned the fact that there was a large Indian population in New York City, a friend skeptically declared he never had seen one—whereupon I wagered a dinner that I could show him a dozen Indians within two hours, and that he would not recognize any of them as Indians.

I won the bet easily. At the garage where I kept my car, the elevator-operator was a full blooded Comanche —mistaken for an Italian by my skeptical friend. A mechanic, whom I knew, was a Delaware; a subway

guard was an Ojibway. There was a Wabenaki clerk in a grocery; a Mikmak in a sporting-goods shop; a Sioux dentist and several more—in addition to some Apache and Caugnawaga steel-workers at a new building being erected. In this connection it is of interest to note that the steel-workers who are members of the Caugnawaga tribe—whose home is near Montreal—are considered the best in the world.

Nearly all of the younger men are engaged in this hazardous profession and are sent far and near wherever there is structural steel-work to be done. Many have been employed on the New York skyscrapers—including the Empire State Building—and on the New York and the Golden Gate bridges.

Members of the tribe have carried on their trade in South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe; for wherever there is structural steel-work to be done, the probability is that there will be Caugnawaga Indians on the job.

Next to them in this profession are the Apaches of our Southwest; yet, many of the white steel-workers are unaware that the men working with them are Indians. Rarely does an Indian announce that he is an Indian, and when they use their English names there is little to hint of their identity.

One white steel-worker told me he had been working among Indians for years, sharing the same bunkhouses with them when away from home, eating and drinking with them, and never suspected they were Indians. "I asked a lot of 'em what nationality they were," he told me, "and they always said 'American'—and damned if they ain't."

But an Indian, or a person with a good percentage of Indian blood, or even a white man who has been long among the Indians, recognizes an Indian at once. My wife is more than half-Indian, yet never have I known a white person to suspect her Indian blood—although Indians invariably recognize it at once.

The majority of white persons, aside from those who live near reservations, or are in more or less direct contact with Indians, know very little about the Indian; and what they think they know is usually wrong.

One of the most prevalent—and almost universal—misconceptions is that all Indians are red. They are referred to as Redmen, Redskins, or Red Indians; yet I have never seen Indians with skins that rightfully could be called red, unless they had been smeared with red ochre.

The color of their skins varies with the tribe; they may be olive; ochreous; brown of various shades; tan-color; dead-leaf color; or even dark brown, or almost black. Moreover, there is a certain amount of individual variation—just as among the white there are brunettes, blondes and redheads—and in the cases of Indians whose parents are of different tribes the offspring may take after either parent. Many of our North American Indians are no darker than a rather swarthy white man or brunette woman; others are rich olive, or light ochreous. But the majority are pale brown, much the same color as a sun-tanned white person. The majority of South and Central American tribes are dead-leaf color—or light brown—while the Mexican Indians of pure blood vary from almost-white to very deep brown, and even black.

Neither is the Indian's hair always coarse, straight and intense black. Many tribes have fine silky, wavy hair that may be black or dark brown. Sometimes there are true redheads and albinos, or partial albinos that may be blondes.

Although the majority of Indians' eyes are brown or black, many—especially among our eastern tribes—have gray, hazel or green eyes. This is not because of any admixture of white blood, for the earliest discoverers and explorers noted the great vari-

ation in the physical make-up of the Indians.

MOST ERRONEOUS also are the popular ideas of the Indian's physical characteristics and appearance. He is pictured as a tall, athletic, splendidly-built man, stoical and dignified; a man with a broad face, square chin, high and prominent cheek-bones, aquiline nose, thin lips, and narrow eyes—in other words the Indian-head nickel Indian. It is true that all these characteristics may be found among members of *some* tribes, but they are by no means typical of the majority.

As a rule, Indians are not usually tall; and, as a whole, they average less in stature than white men. Many of the South American Indians are almost dwarfs, the men averaging barely five feet in height and the women a trifle over four feet. As a general rule, the average Indian is neither a powerfully-built, nor a physically well-proportioned man. In their youth, most Indians are rather slender and sinewy rather than muscular; but as they grow older they become stocky, and often fat and paunchy. Many—especially among the plains tribes—have bandy legs, and because nearly all Indians place one foot in front of the other when walking, they usually are pigeon-toed. Also, from carrying loads or packs on their backs, the majority of the forest-dwelling Indians habitually stoop and are far from erect.

Environment also plays a large part in the Indian's physical characteristics. Forest (and mountain-dwelling) tribes, who walk a great deal, usually have well-proportioned bodies and limbs; but in the case of river Indians—especially those of tropical America—the chests and shoulders are usually developed out of all proportion to the lower trunk and limbs—the result of constant paddling and little walking through many generations.

The features of Indians vary as widely as the colors of their skins or other characteristics. Many of the North American tribes—as well as some Mexican, Central American and South American tribes—have aquiline noses, prominent cheekbones, and the other popularly-accepted Indian features. But there are more Indians who have low-bridged, rather broad flat noses, full rounded cheeks, fairly thick lips, full eyes, and pointed, receeding chins.

It would be fully as foolish and impossible to attempt to picture the various European races as all alike in their physical characteristics as to consider the American Indians in that manner.

Moreover, Indians vary fully as much in their mental characters, as in appearance. All Indians are not by any means stoical, taciturn, dignified, or lacking a sense of humor. In the presence of strangers (if white persons) Indians usually are shy, suspicious and self-conscious; but among themselves, or associated with whites who have won their confidence and friendship, they are talkative, and full of fun; they laugh, chatter and gossip as freely as anyone. I have yet to find an Indian who does not possess a keen sense of humor; and, as a rule, they like practical jokes. Very often they will see the "point" of a humorous story much more quickly than a white man.

THE AGE-OLD belief that Indian babies do not cry is entirely wrong. Indian children as a rule are quieter, and less given to squalling, than are white children; but crying babies among many tribes are as numerous and as exasperating as among white families. However, at a very early age they are taught not to cry—at least audibly—and to be seen, not heard.

A great deal of nonsense has been written and told as to the Indians'

immunity to pain and sufferings. An Indian may not *show* indications of pain or agony, for by a sort of self-hypnosis—or auto-suggestion—he can place himself in a semi-anaesthesia, during which he does not suffer as he would normally. But unless he is prepared for the ordeal, and has time to work himself into this state, he is as susceptible to pain as anyone else; and in case of a sudden unexpected pain, he will often yell or exclaim like any ordinary human being. Many a time I have seen an Indian jump up and emit an agonized cry when he sat on a lively hornet, or trod on a thorn; but I have seen the same man stand knee-deep in a nest of voracious, biting ants while gathering the female "honey ants" that are considered a great delicacy; and although the man's legs were covered with blood from the ants' bites he was apparently insensible to the pain. I have known an Indian to pry an aching tooth from his gums, or permit his fingers to be amputated without the use of an anaesthetic, and not even groan, while the same man would howl and jump about on one foot when a loose rock rolled on his toe.

Most of the popular conceptions of Indians have been derived from stories of our more familiar tribes, from lurid Wild West literature, and the motion pictures. Most persons speak of any Indian's dwelling as a wigwam or a tepee, and think at once of a conical tent of bark, skins or painted canvas. But the bark wigwam was the home of some of our eastern and northern tribes, while the tepee was the home of the nomadic plains Indians. Neither the tepee nor the wigwam was universal. There were many more Indians who dwelt in houses of logs, wattles, earth or sod, and with thatched roofs, than in conical homes of bark or skins. Many of our eastern Indians built substantial houses. The "long houses" of the Iroquois were of logs, and villages of loghouses, enclosed by palisades of logs, were common.

The Mandans built bee-hive-like domed houses of sods; the Navajos were partial to "wikiups" of brush and sods; the Pueblos erected adobe houses, as did many of the Mexican Indians. The Seminoles, and most tribes of tropical America, lived in open sheds raised several feet above the ground and roofed with thatch. Some tribes—even in New England—lived in houses that were partly underground, while Indians in mountainous areas often made their houses of stones.

There are also a great many erroneous ideas regarding the Indians' "war whoops"; s c a l p i n g; facial painting; and "war bonnets". Many Indians never heard or uttered a "war whoop", and would not have known what it meant; thousands of Indians never took a scalp, and never had any desire to do so.

WOODLAND Indians, such as those of our eastern tribes, moved as silently as possible; and anything even slightly resembling a war-whoop would have been fatal to them. They were led and guided by the counterfeited notes of birds; the chirps of insects; the hoot of an owl, or by other forest-sounds; and even when they attacked, they did so silently—or at the most shouted defiance and taunts at their foes.

When the mounted plains Indians attacked, they often yelled and shouted; but there was no typical recognized or universally-used war whoop.

Scalping, with a few exceptions, was restricted to the North American Indians; and many of the tribes never scalped a fallen enemy, until after the white men began paying bounties for scalps. But when the whites paid more for a scalp than for a prime beaver-skin, the Indians decided that scalps possessed some magical or "medicine" power and commenced taking scalps on their own account. Scalps, after all, are merely trophies; and many tribes much preferred a war-trophy in the shape of a dried or shrunken head;

the ribs of an enemy; a thigh-bone; a skull; a hand; or even an enemy's teeth.

Neither did all the North American Indians wear "scalp-locks". This was a custom of certain eastern and northern tribes—a sort of "come and get it if you can" challenge; but far more numerous were the tribes who wore their hair as it grew, either braiding it in long plaits; brushing it in a pompadour; or "bobbing" it in quite modern style.

The "terror-inspiring, hideous painting" of the Indians in battle was not intended to frighten the foe as much as to serve as a camouflage, the colors and designs blending with the lights and shadows and the surroundings. Also, painting faces and bodies had both a symbolic and a "medicine" significance; while finally it served as a means of identification. Each individual had some particular colors and designs that he used, and each tribe and band had certain distinctive forms of painting. This as very important, for when two war-parties of Indians often closely related—met in battle, the painting served to distinguish friend from foe. It was all an open book to the Indians but a meaningless lot of colored pigments and weird patterns to the white man, who was not thoroughly versed in Indians' ways.

It is rarely that we see a magazine-illustration, or a motion-picture, of an Indian battle that the braves are not shown wearing the so-called "war-bonnets" with long feathered "tails". As a matter of fact, no Indian in his senses would go to war wearing one of these showy contraptions. An Indian, when about to attack an enemy, tries to remain as inconspicuous as possible; and nothing is more conspicuous than the feather-tailed "war bonnet".

Moreover, it is a cumbersome affair; the long "tails" would get in his way and interfere with his mounted activities. At times, some of the plains Indians *did* wear the feathered headpiece during attacks on wagon-trains and soldiers; but never the tailed "war-bonnet" which we have come to associate with all Indians, although confined to the plains tribes. In fact "war-bonnet" is a misnomer; as one of my Sioux friends declared, "It should be called 'peace-bonnet' ". It was worn only during pageants, dances, ceremonials, councils and similar affairs—or when an Indian wanted to "dress up" in all his finery. Probably the most interesting feature of the "war-bonnet" is its history, for it was derived from the age-old pleated cloth-and-lace headdress of the *huipile* costume of the Totonacs (Tajin) Indians of Vera Cruz and the Xapotec women of southern Mexico. As the *huipile* headdress spread northward, the pleated cloth was replaced by feathers, and was adopted by the Kickapoos of northwestern Mexico. When the Kickapoos moved into our southwest the showy headdress became popular with the Comanches, Kiowas and other tribes—until it was almost universally used by all of the plains Indians.

ANOTHER popular fallacy is that Indians are beardless, or that they pull out or shave off any hairs that appear on their faces. Some tribes, it is true, have little or no beard; but others have well-developed beards and have to shave daily. Some do pull out the hairs or shave, but others have well developed mustaches and beards. Today many of the Pawnees, Navajos, and other North American tribes have mustaches; and it is not at all unusual to see full-blooded Indians with heavy, bushy beards.

No doubt it will surprise many persons to learn that the Indian men were not lazy and idle, and that the women did not perform all the labor. In reality, both sexes had their duties and allotted tasks. The men hunted, fished, fought, made weapons, canoes, snowshoes and other things; but it was essential to the safety of the family and tribe that the men should not

waste their strength in tasks which the women could do as well, if not better. Between battles and hunts, the men rested and made their ceremonial and dress ornaments; carved fish-hooks, and attended to many small tasks that women were not allowed to do. The women cared for the children, tanned hides, made garments, cooked the meals, and performed other household duties.

When nomadic tribes were on the march the women attended to the taking down and setting up of the lodges and carried the burdens; but this was essential, in order to permit the men to protect the travellers from enemies; scout out a route; and secure food—all duties that could not be done if the men were encumbered with burdens. But when the forest-dwelling tribes moved from one locality to another, the men carried burdens, portaged and paddled the canoes, and performed many of the tasks essential to making camp—in addition to hunting and providing food.

Among most tribes of Indians everywhere, there are certain tasks and occupations which are strictly those of the men—while others are just as strictly confined to the women. Among our plains tribes, all ceremonial objects, "medicine" weapons and shields, headdresses, war trophies, etc., were made by the men.

Taken all in all, the division of labor between Indian men and women is very similar to that of white folks. The man is the (or at least should be) the wage-earner and provider, while the woman attends to the housekeeping, the rearing of the children, and drudgery. From the Indians' point of view the average white man is much lazier, and leaves more work to his woman than do the Indians.

Although we often hear or read of Indian "Princesses," Princes, and "Kings" there never were kings, princes, princesses or royal families among the Indians of North America. It was seldom that a chief inherited the leadership; for in most cases he was selected because of his bravery and prowess in battle and in hunting, or because of his oratorial ability; his wisdom, or other superior qualities. Even in cases where the chieftanship was hereditary, the sons and daughters of the chief were not princes or princesses. They may have had a certain amount of social priority, but that was all; and even a hereditary chief could be deposed, and another man elected as chief, if the Council so decided. Moreover, it was not unusual for certain tribes—such as the Iroquois—to have women chiefs; and a great many famous Indians, who are always referred to as chiefs, were not chiefs at all. Osceola was never a Seminole chief; Sitting Bull was not a chief but a medicine-man or Shaman; and in many cases an Indian might be a War Chief, who led his braves to battle, yet had little or no say in other tribal matters.

IT IS NOW common custom to address, and refer to, any Indian as "chief". Even the Indians themselves do this, for the term "chief"—applied to an Indian—is very much the same as our "Mister" or "Sir", titles that once were restricted to the knights and nobility.

Still another prevalent, but false, idea is that all Indians are cruel and treacherous. Broadly speaking I would say that Indians are neither cruel nor treacherous. Granted that some, such as the Aztecs, had a cruel and bloodthirsty religion demanding human sacrifices, yet they were humane otherwise, passionately fond of flowers, pets and music, and were not at all treacherous. Had they been so, the "Conquest of Mexico" would have been a very different undertaking. It is also true that some tribes—although not by all by any means—tortured their captive enemies; but this, from the Indians' standpoint, was not cruelty but an honor. It gave the prisoner a chance to prove his bravery and stoicism; and many an Indian would have felt grossly insulted if he had

known he would not be tortured when made a prisoner.

Neither must we forget that the standards by which we judge cruelty, and other matters, are not the standards of other people. What may appear cruel to one person may not seem so to another. Most Spaniards regard bullfighting as a legitimate sport, but look upon football and hockey as brutal. We may shudder at vivisection but we calmly split a living lobster in half, or gut and clean a living fish. We hunt and shoot birds and beasts and cause them unspeakable agonies, yet we rarely regard hunting as a cruel sport. Although we shoot a horse with a broken leg, or kill some injured domestic animal to put it out of its misery, we use every effort—and every known means—to prolong the life and the sufferings of a beloved one whose death we know positively is certain.

There are many tribes of Indians who are most tender-hearted, and would never knowingly cause pain or suffering under any considerations. I have seen Indian men, while hunting, stop and pick up a fledgling, and go to great trouble to replace it in its nest. I have seen Indians change the site selected for their camp in order not to disturb a nesting bird, or a litter of helpless creatures. I have seen an Indian in need of meat lower his weapon when he saw a fawn accompanying the doe he was about to kill. Many a time I have watched Indians, after hauling a fish-net, carefully gather and throw back the fish they did not want, whereas a white man would probably have left them to gasp and die on dry land. Neither must we forget that, in most instances, the white men's cruelties were far greater and more awful than those of the Indians. From the very first they killed women and children, often putting them to torture. No Indian "atrocities" exceeded the cavalry raids on peaceful Indian villages and the massacres of women, men and children.

The atrocities of the Spanish conquerors and their followers have never been equalled; and well within the memories of many, the world shuddered at the almost incredible tortures inflicted upon the Indians of the Putumayo and other districts in South America. When the Indians failed to bring in the quantity of raw rubber the white men demanded, arms, feet, ears, noses, tongues were cut off; eyes were blinded; and entire tribes were exterminated during the great rubber boom.

Much the same may be said in respect to Indian honesty and treachery. Until the Indian has come into close contact with white men he is as a rule, reliable and honest. He will keep his promises, and his word—like that of the traditional Chinese—is as good as his bond. I have known an Indian to travel over five hundred miles through forests, across plains, along rapid-filled rivers merely to return ten dollars to a white man, who had advanced the money for the purchase of a hammock—which, later on, the Indian could not obtain. In Chile, a banker told me that he would always loan a Mapuche Indian any amount he desired, and would not demand a note nor inspect the Indians' crops or flocks; he had never lost a cent.

WHEREVER I have travelled among Indians I have always trusted them, and never yet has one broken a promise, failed to keep his word, tried to betray me, or in any way been treacherous—although I have been among reputed hostiles who, God knows, have suffered enough at the hands of white men to have been forgiven if they repaid any member of the white race in kind. I have never found a truly primitive In-

dian who was a thief. I have dwelt for weeks and months in Indian villages where the houses were open sheds, and where all my possessions and trade-goods—priceless and coveted beyond words by the Indians—were fully exposed and unprotected. Yet never have I had a single item stolen.

Very often the women and children would take some object and either wear it, or carry it off to show their friends; but invariably they brought the thing back, or brought something in exchange for the article they had taken. This is regarded as simple trade.

It is a very different matter when Indians are at war, or when an Indian meets an enemy; the Indian then, feels it is up to the best man to win, and he believes thoroughly in the old adage that "All is fair in love and war."

Treachery at such times is all a part of the game, and he expects his foe to employ the same tactics. It is all a game of wits, just as in our so-called "civilized" warfare. Yet, in their dealings with the whites, I do not know of a single authentic case of the North American Indians breaking a promise, or violating a treaty, until the white men had done so first. Nor a single instance of Indian hostility when first meeting white men.

Finally we must not judge the Indians of today by incidents that took place in the early days of our history or during our Indian wars. The ways and the characteristics of our Indians have changed as much, if not more than those of the palefaces; and that reminds me of another error on our part. The Indian term applied to white men, when accurately and literally translated, is "white-skin", not "paleface", which is more appropriate and descriptive. Neither is the proverbial "How" a query. The Indian greeting is *"A-Hau"* or "Peace be with you."

★

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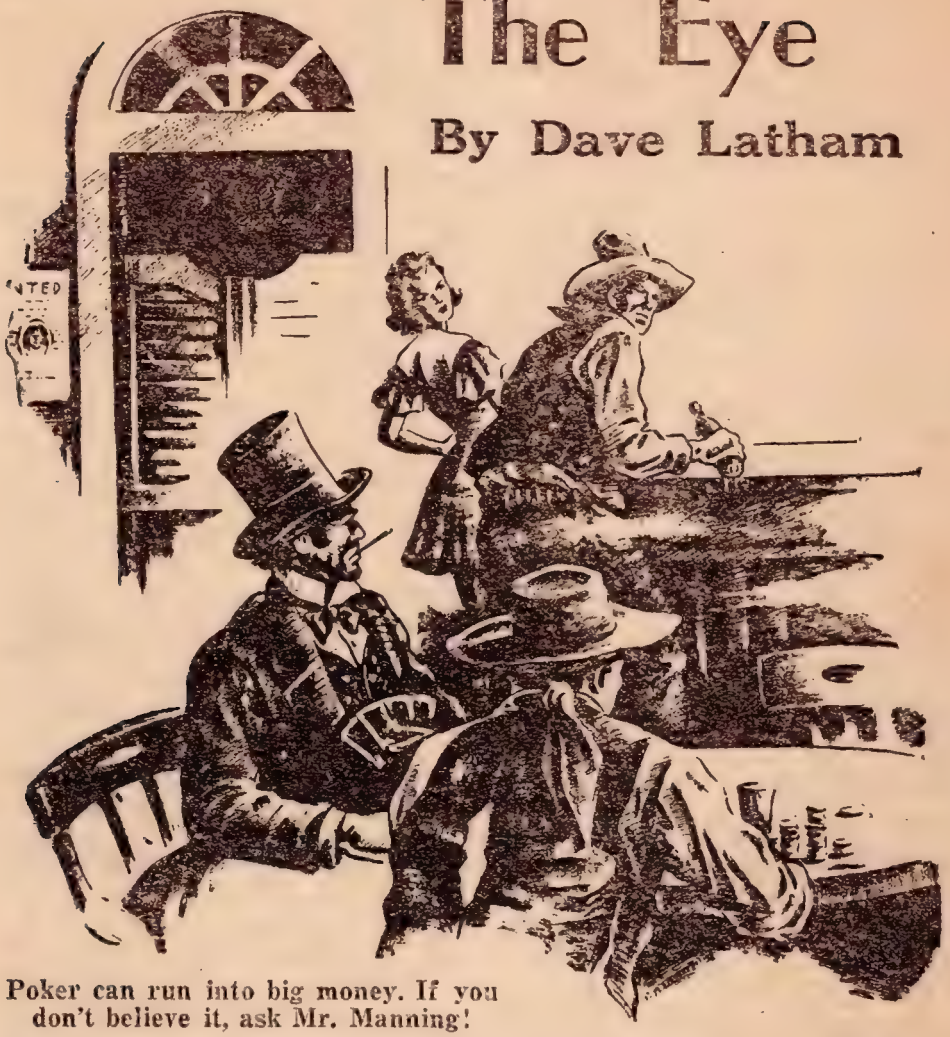

Poker can run into big money. If you don't believe it, ask Mr. Manning!

THE TALL BLOND rider was a stranger in town, but it was easy to see that he knew where he was heading. He rode directly through the outskirts of the town to the *Palace Saloon* and tied up his horse; he walked inside—right over to the left end of the bar near where the big game was always played. A couple of minutes later he drifted quietly over to the game table itself. "Another hand okay?" he asked.

The four men at the table looked up at the stranger and didn't appear happy at the interruption. "We don't play for cigarette paper, Buster," one of them said.

The stranger looked down, fingered his worn and dusty clothes and grinned. "Don't let these sorry duds fool you," he said. "I don't dress for a party when I'm putting in a thousand miles of riding—and I've put in a good part of that thousand miles already. I'm on my way to California." He reached into his pocket, threw a bundle of banknotes on the table, and flicked through the bills with a long, tobacco-stained hand. The lowest bills in the inch-thick pile were hundreds.

One of the men at the table had jet-black hair, and wore a dude-suit as

black as the hair. The frown left his face, and he grinned. "That makes it different," he said. "Pull over a chair."

The stranger looked at the other men. "All right with you boys?"

Another of the players, an old man with white hair and moustache, spoke for the group. "If Manning says you play; you play," he said. "This is his place, and his game." He added slowly, "Leastways, he seems to win 'em all."

Manning kicked the chair back, and jumped to his feet. "I don't go for that kind of talk," he said. The smile had left his face again, and there was a killer's look in his eyes. "If you got any accusing to do, do it now. I win my games fair and square."

The white-haired man looked at him calmly. "Don't get riled, Manning. I'm not accusing you of anything—just cussing your luck. Settle down, now."

Manning returned slowly to his seat, and the tall stranger pulled over a chair and sat down himself. "Glad that's settled," he said. "I thought for a minute the game was going to bust up before I got into it." He looked around the group. "In case anybody's interested, you can call me Joe McCloud."

"Glad to know you, McCloud," Manning said. He began to deal the cards, rapidly and expertly. "We play draw poker here; ten bucks minimum."

"Suits me," McCloud said. He picked up his cards, smiled at them, and opened. He took that game, and the next couple. Then he lost one, but took the next three in a row.

"Question," he said to Manning. "You say ten bucks is the minimum. What about the maximum?"

"Maximum? The sky."

McCloud looked at the cards which had been dealt to him. "All right," he said. "I'll open for three-hundred."

The white-haired man whistled, threw down his cards. "Well," he said, "I hadn't had a good hand all evening, anyway."

Manning matched the three hundred. "Now it's beginning to look like a game." After a minute, the remaining two men threw in also.

McCloud took the hand. Manning took the next couple, and then one of the other men took one. The remaining man, who hadn't taken a single pot, threw down his cards and quit when Manning opened the following hand at five hundred dollars.

Manning took it. McCloud smiled, and opened the next round at a thousand. Manning saw him.

The one remaining player got to his feet. "Too rich for my blood," he said. He didn't leave the area, however—just stood alongside and watched. By this time, anyhow, every man in the place had gathered around the table.

The game went over for a while, and McCloud's luck began to turn. He drew a number of blanks in a row, hands which were far below those drawn by Manning. Then he got a couple of decent ones, but Manning's were still better. His pile of money was still high, but nowhere nearly as high as it had been originally, when the big hand of the evening arrived.

McCLOUD was picking up his cards and looking at each one as Manning dealt them out. The first one which Manning slid toward him was a king. So was the second.

The expression on McCloud's face didn't change.

The next two cards were a deuce and a seven, which didn't help. But then the fifth card was slid toward him, and a slight smile appeared on McCloud's lips. The fifth card was another king, and three of a kind was a heck of a hot hand with the way the cards had been running that evening.

McCloud said quietly, "I'll open for ten thousand."

Manning looked at him. "That's a lot of money, McCloud."

"I said I'm opening for ten thousand."

"Your funeral," Manning said. He slid money toward the center of the table. "I'm with you."

Then McCloud did something unusual. Instead of discarding the two useless cards, he tossed out only the

seven. "I'll let you hit me with one."

Manning slid a card over to him, took a single card himself.

McCloud looked at the card he had received. It was a fourth king.

He took a deep breath. "I'm in for another ten."

Manning left his first four cards lying on the table, looked at his fifth card. The expression on his face did not change, but the gleam in his eye deepened. "I'll see your ten, and raise you ten."

McCloud looked at him for a minute. There was a dead, breath-held silence throughout the saloon. "I'll cover the raise, and raise *you* ten."

Manning said without hesitation, "Back at you, and still another ten."

"See your ten, and ten more."

Manning could control his smile no longer. He said, happily, "Thanks, McCloud. And I'll see that ten and give you another ten raise."

McCloud reached into his pocket, lit a cigarette, and inhaled slowly. "Just a minute, Manning. I've been tossing cold cash into the pot, but all you've been doing is saying you see and raise me. All you put in in cash was the opening ten, and another ten. What about the other fifty thousand?"

Manning said, placatingly, "Don't get nervous, McCloud. Not many people carry around as much cash as you do. I'm good for my bet—anybody around here will tell you that."

"Mister," McCloud said, "I don't know you from Adam, and there's better than a hundred grand riding on this game. I put cash in, and I want to see your cash in the pot."

There was a look almost of pleading on Manning's face. "By all that's holy," he said, "don't stop the game now while I have to go scouting around for the money. It would take me an hour or more." He paused suddenly. "Wait a minute." He scuttled away from the table, busied himself for a few moments at a huge safe, and came back with a cloth bag. He turned the bag over, and money, mostly bills of high denomination, spilled out onto the table. "There's twenty-five thousand here, mostly money I've been lucky enough to win in games the last couple of weeks from the other fellows around here. That's half the money I owe—and look." He took a deep breath. "I'll put up my saloon for the other twenty-five. It's worth twenty-five thousand, easy."

McCloud looked around the room. "I'll buy that," he said. He looked around at the faces watching him. "You fellows witness that?" There were grim nods from every man in the place. "All right," McCloud said. He pushed the remainder of his money into the pot. "I'll see your ten thousand, that cleans me. Betting's over."

"Betting's over," Manning echoed, hoarsely. "What have you got?"

McCloud's hand shook a little as he upturned four of his cards. "Four kings," he said.

Manning threw back his head and laughed, wildly and triumphant. "No good," he said. "No damn good at all. I drew three aces the first time, and then, after I discarded, I got me a five—and another ace. I got four aces to your four kings, McCloud."

He started to upturn his cards, and then stopped, his hand in midair, as he saw that McCloud was laughing, too.

"The hell you have," McCloud said. "Either you looked at your cards too hasty, or you need one of them pairs of spectacles. Look here and weep, brother." He flipped over his fifth card, the ace of spades...

Savagely, Manning turned over his own cards. The first was the useless five, and the next three were aces, all right. But the final card was a deuce.

"Too bad," McCloud said. "Sometimes when a guy's excited, a deuce looks just like an ace." He reached over calmly and gathered in the money.

Then, as Manning's hand jerked toward his side, McCloud was on his feet, a .45 in his hand. "Move your hand one more inch, Manning, and I'll shoot my initials in your belly. I won

that hand fair and square, and the winnings are mine." He grinned. "Anyhow, you might say I won it just about as fair and square as you been winning since you bought this saloon last month. I'll give you until sundown to vacate the saloon, and get out of town."

McCLOUD was back at the saloon ten minutes after sundown, and Manning had already gone—looking, one of the men reported, like a beaten dog.

"You'd have loved that sad look on his face, McCloud," the man added. He chortled happily. "I've been patting myself on the back all afternoon for that idea I got after Manning had been beating us all at cards for weeks—obviously cheating, but too slick for any of us to catch him at it." He grinned around at the rest of the men in the room. "My pal McCloud here may be a card artist, too—but he's square to the fellows who were his friends back in Abilene. I knew he'd get us out of this jam."

McCloud counted out the money quietly, returning to each man the amount he had lost in past weeks, retaining from each a small share to make up his five thousand dollar fee. "Glad to oblige," he said. "Only, the next time—you better make sure you sell this saloon to a real saloon-keeper, not a card-shark."

"You bet we will," his friend said. "Just one thing, Joe, before you go. How about explaining something that's been puzzling the devil out of us? It's easy to figure out that Manning dealt you those four kings to rope you into making big bets, but you're not going to tell me that an experienced card-artist like him made a mistake and dealt himself three aces and a deuce instead of four aces?"

McCloud smiled. "Oh, Manning dealt himself four aces, all right," he said. "Any good card man can give himself four aces any time at all. The only thing, though, is that when you're giving yourself four aces with a room full of men watching you it's quite a stunt, and you've got to give your full attention to doing it."

He got up, and walked toward the door. "So, you see," he said, "while he was so consarned busy giving himself those aces, I just swiped one of 'em and left my deuce in its place."

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True Fact Feature
by Lauran Paine

BLACK BART

FEW NAMES in Western history have achieved the notoriety or aroused such romantic interest as Black Bart. And yet, despite the aura of mystery that still shrouds Black Bart and his escapades, little factual truth is known about him today by those to whom his name is synonymous with the early West.

Black Bart was born in New York as Charles E. Boles. He was married and had a family living, at the time of his depredations, in Illinois. He had fought in the Union Army during the Civil War and was mustered out in Decatur, Illinois. So much for the vital statistics.

Black Bart sucessfully held up twenty-seven stages and was finally captured after the twenty-eighth robbery. At that time fifty-five years of age; of medium height, slender with piercing blue eyes and a receding hairline, he was sentenced to six years in a California prison, which was a hard sentence for a man of his age. He served his time and, with allowances in his favor for good behavior, was released before the full expiration of his sentence.

Any mystery that should gather about Black Bart should attach itself to him after his release from prison for, despite the fact that his wife, whom he had deserted many years before, came to his defense during his trial in San Francisco, and subsequently waited for him to complete his prison sentence, had only a brief respite in her matrimonial troubles because, soon after his release, Black Bart disappeared and has never been heard of since.

Charles E. Boles, who frequently used the name of Bolton, was a quiet man who seldom spoke about himself and, if old records are to be believed, never spoke of his reasons for turning bandit nor of his personal life. He was a natty dresser, not flashy, but in

good taste. In fact when he was first apprehended he was wearing a custom tailored suit of conservative yet stylish cut, an expensive derby hat, a diamond ring and stick pin to match and was carrying a gold-headed cane.

Apparently Black Bart had some good reason for picking on the Wells Fargo Company. Whatever the reason, and it must have been a good one to the bandit himself since he successfully held up twenty-seven stages between 1875 and 1883, he was never known to rob any other company or individual.

About the most unusual thing about Black Bart was the fact that in an age when desperados depended on and used the best and fastest horses available, he actually never did employ a horse in any of his robberies. This is doubly peculiar since horses were the only form of individual locomotion in his day. In fact, Black Bart at one time robbed two stages at spots thirty miles apart and he is known to have traveled this distance afoot over mountainous country.

Black Bart spent many an enjoyable evening in the home of some rural folk who reported later that their guest was a mild man with an excellent sense of humor who made a wonderful dinner guest. He would recite tales of his travels over the hemisphere and keep his audience spellbound with his facility with the English language and his earthy humor. He traveled about with a valise which he later discarded for a bedroll and which contained food, an axe, a linen duster and a flour sack with two eye holes cut in it and a dismantled shotgun.

The records proved that Black Bart never used his shotgun. Even the bravest of the Wells Fargo Company drivers took a reticent interest in a man standing a few feet from them with a cocked shotgun in his hands, as would any sane person. Even a blind man would have difficulty missing his target at ten feet with a scattergun, and Black Bart was by no means blind.

Northern California had not had a colorful figure to fasten its imagination on for some years, so when Black Bart came on the scene and proved himself a master at his art, the people accorded him the notoriety that usually settles upon the shoulders of a gentleman highwayman.

That Bart thoroughly enjoyed himself as a mysterious highwayman can be little doubted. As he became a byword to the citizens and anathema to Wells Fargo Company, he began to leave little verses behind him. These were anything but masterpieces in metered poetry, but occasionally the bandit would include a word or a sentence that would shock the reader into forgetting the untutored rhythm of the peom. For a fuller understanding of the above paragraph, below is reproduced an exact and literal copy of one of Black Bart's poems;

"I've labored long and hard for bread
For honor and for riches
But on my corns too long you've trod
You fine haired sons of bitches.
BLACK BART, the PO 8"

This verse was written on the back of a waybill that was given to the driver of the stage from Fort Ross to the Russian River, August 3rd, 1877, in which robbery Black Bart got $300 in currency and $305.52 in a check.

Black Bart's net accumulation of Wells Fargo Company's funds, or funds consigned to them, is not of record, but it is safe to assume that Bart wasn't financially embarrased for a long time and furthermore the funds that he had, very likely influenced him into dropping from sight after his release from prison. After all, why should a man with the stigma of exconvict remain in a country where he was known as such, when, by the simple expedient of digging up his loot, he could go abroad, or anywhere else he chose, and spend the rest of his life in comparative ease.

BLACK BART was captured by one of those little oversights that cause the downfall of the most meticulous criminals. He quite by accident left a handkerchief behind in the brush and this object was seized by sharp-eyed Wells Fargo Company special agents who were becoming bitter and irritable after the long chase. The handkerchief was sent to San Francisco because it bore a laundry mark thought to have originated in that city. True to facts the laundries of San Francisco were canvassed and the handkerchief was found to belong to one C. E. Bolton who resided at the Webb House, Room 40, at 37 Second Street. C. E. Bolton, or, more correctly, Charles E. Boles, alias Black Bart, was at long last in the hands of the people he had victimised for so long and the Wells Fargo Company left no stone unturned in seeing that he was prosecuted with vigor and dispatch.

Black Bart's wife, who had moved from Illinois to Hannibal, Missouri, where she resided with a married daughter, eventually discovered that the husband she had assumed had been killed by Indians in the early Seventies, was Black Bart, the notorious Northern California outlaw. She immediately came West and did what she could in defense of her errant spouse, which was practically nothing, and then waited for him to emerge from prison, a contrite, bent old man. Instead he emerged a straight backed gentleman, no longer young, true, but not yet so old and feeble that he needed a matronly arm about his shoulders either, and he promptly disappeared altogether and left absolutely no clues whatsoever as to where he had gone or why.

Prior to his apprehension Black Bart was handed a nearly fatal surprise. This occurred on the 13th of July, 1882, when the stage from Laporte to Oroville was stopped by a lone bandit. Both the driver and the special messenger, George Hackett, who was riding inside, recognised the outlaw as Black Bart by the method he employed in staging the holdup. Bart almost invariably jumped out in front of the team and crouched, pointing his shotgun at the driver. This maneuver gave his body protection from anyone foolhardy enough to attempt to shoot him by keeping the horses between himself and any potential resistance.

This time, however, Bart got the surprise of his life and, while it is stated that the driver had already tossed down the little green box, Bart can safely be said to have earned the money, because, as soon as the box hit the ground the special messenger inside the coach fired two rapid and deadly shots, both of which are reputed to have split the air near the outlaw's linen duster. Bart, startled into sudden and amazing action, took to the brush like a woodtick with a hot-foot and returned for his loot only after the stage was a careening miniature in a great spiral of dust in the distance. Naturally we have no way of knowing whether or not Black Bart's gentlemanly behavior dropped from his shoulders for a moment or two as he watched the stage disappear, but it's a safe bet that his remarks were not of the kind normally found iin first grade readers. This, however, is the only known case of violence that occurred during any of his holdups.

It is generally believed that Black Bart had an aversion to violence. This is borne out by the fact that he never once treatened, vocally or otherwise, any harm to those he robbed, drivers or passengers. In fact he actually returned valuables to women passengers in the approved Robin Hood tradition with the remark that he only robbed the Wells Fargo Company.

All of Black Bart's robberies were in the counties of Mendocino, Yuba, Sonoma, Sierra, Butte, Plumas, Shasta or Trinity, in Northern California. He may have been a disgruntled settler from the East, as some claim, but it is based on the facts known about him which include his knowledge of English, which was above average, his ap-

preciation of fine clothing, his excellent handwriting and other small characteristics that are not normally found in farmers or laborers.

That he was an interesting person cannot be denied and that he was a successful highwayman is history, but the why and wherefore are a mystery to this day, just as his later life must be. However, Black Bart was another in the long list of colorful men who, by audacity and coolness, right or wrong, welded together the great chain that held the American West together and created the virile heritage we have today, to study and cherish.

★

A BIT OF WESTERN SHOOTING

Fact Feature by J. J. Mathews

OUT ON the Divide, in the southern part of Virginia City, there was pure enjoyment in handling guns. One morning a man fired six shots at his brother-in-law and missed, though the practice took place within the bounds of a small dooryard. During the afternoon, some men at a saloon were discussing the morning's shooting, and all agreed that it was scandalous.

After much more talk, a man from Pioche—a lively camp in the eastern part of Nevada (they killed a man there every week or two) —bantered a Comstocker, whom he knew to be a fine shot with a pistol, to go out into the back yard with him and do some shooting, just to show the "boys" how it should be done.

In the saloon—which also was a grocery-store—was a box of eggs. The Piocher proposed that they each shoot two eggs off the bare head of the other at the distance of ten paces—the one missing to treat the crowd. The Comstocker was determined not to be bluffed, so all adjourned to the back yard. Each man used his own six-shooter. The Comstocker first "busted" his egg on the top of the Piocher's head. The feat was loudly applauded.

It was then the Piocher's time to shoot, but when the Comstocker removed his hat, there was a laugh, as the top of his head was as smooth as a billiard-ball.

For five minutes all tried to make an egg stand on the smooth pate; it couldn't be done. The Piocher then taunted the Comstocker with having gone into the arrangement knowing he was safe. The latter told him to set up his egg. The Pioche man turned, went into the saloon; and came out with a handful of flour, which he dabbed upon the bald head of the Comstocker. Triumphantly, he planted in it his egg, fell back ten paces, and knocked it off. The Comstock man told him to set up his second egg; he didn't want to have his head chalked twice. This was done, and the wreck of the second egg streamed over the Comstocker's pate.

The Piocher now stood out with his last egg on his head. The Comstocker raised his pistol and fired. The Piocher bounded a yard into the air, and the egg rolled unscathed from his head.

"I've lost!" cried the Comstocker. "Let all come up and drink. I've put half the width of my bullet through the top of his left ear!" So it proved upon measurement.

All Washoe men didn't stand fire so well as this pair of egg-shooters. On one occasion, a "sport," of herculean frame, and wearing a huge black beard, cheated a miner out of four or five hundred dollars in a game of draw-poker. The miner demanded the return of his money; the gambler laughed. The miner, who was quite a small man, left the place wearing an ugly look. Some of those present, who knew the miner, told the big sport that he had better leave, as his man

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THE HERITAGE OF SPOTTED GOAT

Spotted Goat trusted the White Father, who had made pledges to him, and to his people!

by Lon Williams

SPOTTED GOAT sat astride his buckskin pony on a mound-like hill in Goose Creek Valley, a cool Dakota wind beating against his naked chest. His land spread northward and westward, and many cattle grazed upon its spring-green. This was his estate, a rich domain of four hundred eighty acres upon which he had erected a cabin, corrals, snow barriers and shelters, and in whose rich, bottomless soil he had planted beans, squash, corn and potatoes. He was proud and confident in his young strength, in his ownership of property; he was especially proud that he was an American, fixed and rooted in this vast, wind-swept land of his forefathers.

Yet he was also ill at ease, had been so for many days, and now he saw a wagon and team break sky eastward on Prairie Dog Hill. For days smoke had been rising in that direction, too. There'd been no Indian signals in that smoke, no warning of advancing soldiers, no summons to war. This was a different sort of invasion; a railroad, ties of wood, rails of steel, hundreds

of men and teams and smoking, puffing iron horses. This railroad was driving slowly westward, toward Goose Creek Valley, toward Spotted Goat's ranch, cabin, crops, snow-shelters and corrals.

Nobody had asked permission to build a railroad across his land. Did not this land belong to him? Did not ownership mean that strangers could not invade his domain without his leave? That, he had believed, was what it meant to own land. Consequently he was disturbed and angry. For that reason, also, he swung his buckskin toward Prairie Dog Hill and lashed him into run.

A survey party under Webb Blantin approached that same spot. Blantin eyed his pole man through his transit, a slender young man with an intelligent, honest face. Although Blantin was party chief, pole man Burks Cahal was a company special agent who had quoted law to Blantin on too many occasions. If he wasn't careful, he'd get in Blantin's way one time too many for his own good.

Reluctantly Blantin shifted his transit from man to red-and-white pole. He swept his arm wide to left, then gradually back to right. "There," he shouted.

Cahal drove a stake and moved on. Blantin lifted his tripod and followed. He was big and broad-shouldered, with eyes that were pale blue, his lips thick and unsmiling. Creed Oliver and Gettys Tharp, chain men, dragged their steel tape on westward. Blantin regarded them with approval. They were his men, selected because of their bad character and ready obedience to his personal commands. Any time he decided to eliminate Cahal, he would have willing agents at hand.

Two more moves took them to where Blantin could see down into a lovely green valley, watered by a creek that meandered gently between its parallel tree-shaded banks. Blantin stared in silence at the sight of such enchantment. His secret ambition had long envisaged such a spot as this—land and water for a cattle kingdom.

Wagon man Sloan Satterfield, a thin-faced hardcase, spat from atop his wagon seat. "Nice country ahead there, Chief."

All of them had stopped to gaze in wonder.

"Yeah," said Blantin. "Nice country. Not only that; it's mine."

Creed Oliver grunted in derision. He was round-featured and short, with a killer instinct that had put a sneer permanently on his mouth. He commented mockingly, "That's easy to say. You look at a watered stretch of prairie and say it's yours, then hocus-pocus, mumbo-jumbo and, lo-and-behold, yours it is."

"That's exactly how easy it's going to be," declared Blantin, putting down his tripod and squatting to rest. "I've got a contract. As a bonus for surveying this railroad line, I'm to take my pick of eighteen sections of land, eleven thousand five hundred and twenty acres, in any township, on either side of our line. Right here is my choice, beginning now."

Wagon man Satterfield spat again and nodded ahead. "Don't know about that, Chief. Look a-comin'."

What they saw coming was a man on a buckskin horse. At first they could distinguish only a slim bareheaded figure, riding bareback, but he came on at a fast clip, and soon they saw he was Indian, or possibly mixed-breed.

"Looks like a cabin back there, too, and corrals," observed Creed Oliver. His stubble darkened face wore a crooked grin. "Maybe somebody's done spoke for some of your land, Blantin."

Blantin's eyes chinked, his face tightened with belligerence. "No Redskin can preempt anything I want." He rose and put his big fists on his hips. Seconds later he glared upward at a young, confident Indian who returned his glare with proud, haughty fearlessness, then swung down.

HE STOOD six and a half feet tall beside his horse and lifted his right hand, palm forward. "Spotted Goat friend of paleface. But Spotted Goat own flat land you soon come to."

Blantin's mouth twisted from suppressed fury. His voice was hard with contempt. "You don't say!" He looked his swarthy, half-naked visitor up and down. "I suppose you are that dog you call Spotted Goat?"

Goat put back his shoulders, held his head high. "Me Spotted Goat. Me own land. Four hundred and eighty acres. Good land. Feed many cattle. Me half-breed Sioux. Great White Father make treaty with half-breed Sioux. He give Spotted Goat scrip and say to him, 'Buy land.' With scrip, Spotted Goat pick out his land and say, 'My land here.' Great White Father say, 'Improve land.' Spotted Goat build house on land, have crops, horses, wagon, plow, many cattle."

Blantin's eyes blinked slowly, their faded blue glinting. "Spotted Goat bleats with much confidence. Maybe he doesn't know that Great White Father lives a long way off."

Spotted Goat crouched and laid his right palm to earth. "Great White Father make wise law. Where law is, there is Great White Father. His law say half-breed Sioux can have land, if he locate and improve land. Me do all that. And now, Spotted Goat can put his hand here, where grass grow green and warm, and say, 'This earth belong to Spotted Goat. No man, Indian or paleface, can set foot upon his land, unless Spotted Goat say so. No man can take away his land. And when Spotted Goat find him squaw and have papoose, it will be papoose land when Spotted Goat go to happy hunting ground'."

Creed Oliver chuckled. "In other words, Blantin, he means keep off."

Blantin's jaws knotted. "He's either crazy or a fool."

Pole man Burks Cahal had listened with interest. This half-breed's eloquence and courage were inspiring and contagious. They appealed to his sense of law and justice. Cahal set his hat level on his head. "Goat speaks truth, Blantin. There is such a law as he speaks of."

Blantin directed to Cahal his special contempt for men of law. "So our lawyer pole man takes up for a redskin, eh? Well, keep your snoot out of this, Cahal, or you'll be a lawyer without a job."

Goat rested his dark eyes upon Cahal for a moment. Here was a man about his own size, different, too, from his companions; handsomer, cleaner, more to be trusted. "Pole man is friend of Spotted Goat."

"I am," said Cahal.

"Well, so am I," declared Blantin. He put craft and deception into his voice. "I must admit that Spotted Goat has got it all figured out. More than that, I'm always ready to shake hands with a man who knows where he stands."

Blantin thrust his right hand forward. Goat was deceived. He wanted to be friends with these pale faces. He wanted to be an American, with land to hold, land that would become a heritage to his descendants who would build cabins, raise food, be fixed and rooted in this land.

But when he reached and took Blantin's hand, Blantin jerked him off balance and planted a left hook hard against Spotted Goat's jaw. Goat dropped to his knees, shook his head, dazed and bewildered.

"So you think you own this land!" sneered Blantin. He kicked upward, boot heel contacting chin.

Goat went over backward and rolled through a somersault.

Blantin stood spraddle-legged, within foot-reach of Goat's dark head. "Now maybe Spotted Goat not so sure this land is his. Maybe Spotted Goat will get some sense in his head and clear out."

Goat heard Cahal say coldly, "You

shouldn't have done that, Blantin. This half-breed is within his rights."

Then Blantin, threatening, "You keep out of this, Cahal. I warned you once."

Spotted Goat lay sprawled, face down, motionless. Underneath, fastened to his rawhide belt, a scabbard held a hunting knife. His clearing thoughts concentrated on that hidden weapon. Slowly his mind steadied, his muscles tensed to alertness. With a savage cry he sprang to his feet, knife in hand, and thrust at Blantin's heart. "Death to paleface!" he cried as he thrust.

But he had not reckoned with Blantin's men. Creed Oliver swung out a foot, and wagon man Satterfield lashed with a long rawhide whip. Burks Cahal sprang forward in aid of Goat, but his intervention was cut short by a green survey stake swung by Gett Tharp.

Goat's knife hand was entangled in Satterfield's whiplash; his left was gripped by Oliver. Blantin, unhindered, waded into him with driving fists. Goat gave Blantin one hard belly-kick, then dropped, unconscious, from a head blow inflicted by Tharp.

CAHAL OPENED his eyes, groaned, and sat up. Goat and his buckskin had disappeared. Cahal sleeved his face. Blantin was arranging his tripod, leveling his transit.

"Up with you, pole man. We're surveying a railroad. Remember?"

Cahal looked them over; stocky, round-headed Creek Oliver; Gettys Tharp, lean and vicious looking; hatchet-faced Satterfield, grinning insolently; Blantin, big, brutal and treacherous.

"I remember your doing something very foolish, Blantin," Cahal replied. He got up, put on his hat, took up his red-and-white pole, and staggered off behind Creed Oliver, forward chain man. From that moment onward, he knew, his life would be in danger.

When Spotted Goat's senses returned, he found himself being dragged by a rope extended from his ankles to his buckskin's tail. His horse had waded into a creek and stopped to drink. Goat roused to a feel of running, cold water and an awareness of aches and bruises.

Painfully he drew himself up, hunched forward, freed his feet and stood erect. His horse's right hip bore a bloody welt, put there no doubt by a rawhide whip. His bridle had been removed.

Here was familiar scenery. By degrees oriented, Goat measured in his mind back to where his senses had left him. Two miles, by his reckoning. Two miles he had been dragged while unconscious. Two miles he had suffered bumps and scratches, and it was only by great good fortune that he was alive.

Yet all of his physical misery was as nothing, contrasted to his spiritual suffering, his humiliation and disillusionment. When he'd fastened a guide rope to his horse's mouth, mounted him and ridden up onto flat land, he saw them coming less than two miles away—chain men, pole man, instrument man and wagon man. In his pride and vanity, he had thought to stop them, make them respect his right of ownership and possession. He'd got only a beating for his trouble. They came on as if nothing had happened, aiming their survey line straight across his four hundred eighty acres. He was puzzled, as well as humiliated. He was half-breed Sioux; he'd been to school that was set up by Great White Father; he spoke the same tongue as Great White Father, and blood of the pale face was in his veins. He summed it up, "Me own land, and me not own land. Great White Father make wise law, but law no good to Spotted Goat."

He rode herd for a while and returned, corralled his buckskin, and went into his cabin. Every muscle in him had become sore, every joint

ached; there were countless scratches on his back and arms. But his thoughts were not of those. He'd had time to think of other things. His great Sioux forefathers had been warriors. With bows and arrows they had brought down mighty buffalo. Long ago they had been allies of great chief Pontiac. Their arrows and rifles had dealt death on countless battlegrounds. Sioux blood was in his veins; Sioux vengeance was in his heart.

In a corner of his cabin stood his weapons, among them a long bow a tribal chief had given him as a reminder of his Sioux blood. Buffalo were no more, yet he had learned his ancestral art and used it to bring down fleet antelope and skulking wolf. He had not used it against man, pale face or Indian, but its sting could be as deadly to man as to beast.

He examined this tribal weapon with affection, kneed it into a curve and pulled its rawhide tight. From a hanging quiver he lifted an arrow, fixed its feathered end to string and drew slowly back until arrowhead and gripping fingers touched. Slowly he eased it into reverse direction. This was a weapon that could be used most effectively at night—against an enemy who slept or sat, unwary, by his campfire.

There was a rifle, too, with ammunition.

GOAT PUT away his weapons and went outside. For a while he sat beside his door, cross-legged, and watched. Unhurriedly those men came on, peg by peg. Their direction told him they would pass close to his cabin. Their rate of advance indicated they would arrive before high sun.

When they were a quarter-mile off, he brought out his rifle and resumed his seat, rifle within easy reach. They would come straight on; they'd pass his door, but they would not again touch Spotted Goat. He would let them pass. But night would come, and in its darkness there'd be a reckoning.

Two hundred yards away, Blantin called a halt.

Satterfield drew up with his team and wagon. "Something wrong, Chief?"

"Not too much so," Blantin replied. "Pass down those rifles. Looks like we may have to shoot us an Indian."

Satterfield passed them down.

All except Cahal took one. Cahal waved his aside. "Blantin, I repeat, Goat is within his rights. I'm not going to participate in his murder."

Blantin faced him with angry determination. "You're a lawyer, Cahal. You're looking for a spot where you can lay out a town, where you can hang out your shingle. Fair enough. But as for me, I'm an outdoor man. I'm looking for cattle range, and I've found it. No redskin is going to squat on it and tell me I can't have it."

"It is not only Spotted Goat who says you can't have it, Blantin. Law says you can't. Goat's Great White Father says you can't."

Craftiness stole into Blantin's pale eyes. "What do you say, lawyer?"

"I, too, say you can't. Not because of my personal objection, but because of law. A railroad is coming behind us, within ten miles already of this spot. Law and government ride its rails. Goat just now may have doubts respecting his Great White Father, but someday his faith will be restored and justified."

"Sounds like we got a traitor among us, Blantin," observed Creed Oliver.

"Yeah," said Blantin. A deceptive resignation, however, softened his countenance. "Cahal is probably right, though." He shrugged. "And since you are a man of law, Cahal, you go tell Goat we mean him no harm. All we aim to do is line our pegs past his cabin. You might tell him, too, that if he gives trouble we'll shoot him."

Cahal dropped his pole. "You're talking with more sense, Blantin. Goat wants to be our friend; he also wants

his rights respected. Treat him decent, and there'll be no trouble."

"That's just what we aim to do," Blantin called after Cahal. "You tell him so." A moment later he jerked his head at Creed Oliver and Gett Tharp. "See that rifle leaning against Goat's cabin? When Goat gets up to speak to Cahal, how're we going to know whether he's getting up to be friendly, or to grab his gun and start killing?"

A grin twisted Oliver's cruel mouth. "I get it, Blantin." He glanced at Tharp and Satterfield. They, too, were grinning. Satterfield climbed down from his wagon and crouched by a wheel.

All of them readied their rifles and waited.

Goat, too, was waiting.

He recognized Cahal, his pole-man friend. Cahal carried no gun. But Goat saw guns elsewhere, and suspicion stirred.

Cahal was suspicious, too. Here was a perfect setup for murder. At a distance of a hundred feet from Goat's cabin, he stopped abruptly. Hands cupped to his mouth, he called only loud enough to be heard by Goat. "You're in danger, Goat. If you stand up to talk to me, you'll be shot. So, when you move, dive inside, and make it quick."

Goat was stone still. He saw four rifles aimed in his direction. But a second glance revealed to him that Blantin's rifle was aimed at Cahal.

Goat's voice was low, but clear. "They kill pole man, too. One gun aimed at him. We dive same time."

"Thanks, Goat," said Cahal. "Are you ready? Dive!"

Goat's leap was panther quick. Cahal, dropping forward, saw him disappear, rifle in hand, as four shots crashed and bullets smacked against logs.

From inside, Goat called out, "Pole man hurt?"

"Pole man all right," Cahal answered. "Close your door and stay where you are until survey party has gone by."

Goat's door closed, then it opened a crack. "Pole man come in with Spotted Goat?"

"No," Cahal called back. "I'm going back to pale faces. And you must not shoot at them, Goat, unless they try to break in."

"Me listen to word of friend." His door closed and a latch bar fell into place.

Cahal got up and faced about. Blantin and his men had put away their rifles.

"We thought that redskin was going for his gun," Blantin said as Cahal rejoined them. "That's why we banged at him."

"Could have looked that way," said Cahal as he picked up his pole.

"Could have!" snorted Creed Oliver. "It did look it. What is more, he grabbed it. If we hadn't made things hot for him, he would've plugged you."

Cahal made no comment. He was thinking how close Blantin's bullet had come to him. Except for Goat's observing eye and warning words, Cahal himself would have been dead. Of that, he had not a doubt.

Blantin asked, "Did you warn that redskin to stay indoors?"

"He will not bother."

"He better not," said Gett Tharp.

"All right," snapped Blantin. "Let's get moving."

THEY RESUMED their work. Within Goat's cabin there was no sound as they passed. His buckskin whinnied from a corral. Here and yonder scores of cattle grazed leisurely, their heads toward water.

Blantin's party stopped at Goose Creek, cooked and ate their noonday meal.

Cahal, suspicious now of all of them, maintained a watchful eye. He observed Blantin in particular, saw him glance upstream and down, his gaze

lingering where Goose Creek flowed in long, deep pools. Here in this valley was a cattleman's paradise. To a man of Blantin's stripe, dreamer of a cow empire, murder would be a small price to pay for this land.

Blantin strode back and forth, hands behind his broad back. He stopped in front of Cahal. "What's on your mind, lawyer?"

Cahal had been expecting something. He replied calmly, "I'm thinking what a fine place this is to go fishing."

"That's not what you were thinking."

"Then what was I thinking?"

"I don't know, but I figure I can guess."

"Then there's no point in your asking."

Creed Oliver whetted a knife on his boot sole. "We was wonderin' what you said to that redskin. He made a mighty quick get-away, just before we slammed at him."

Gett Tharp spat. "And how come you to fall flat all so sudden? Must've thought somebody aimed to plug you, too."

Wagon man Satterfield, seated on a sandbar, tossed pebbles into Goose Creek and watched ensuing water rings grow large as they drifted slowly downstream. "Better not be too hard on him, fellers. Cahals are important people back East. In this western country, too."

This was a timely warning with substance. Cahal was grateful.

"Who's doing anything to Cahal?" Blantin demanded. "Hitch up your team, Satterfield; we're wasting time."

Satterfield hitched up and found a place to cross Goose Creek.

But by early evening they'd made only small progress. Blantin pretended that his instrument needed adjustment. Also, a tripod screw gave trouble. He discovered a badger hole, too, and wasted time over it.

They camped at a bend, where Goose Creek made a wide sweep to the left in its northwestwardly course. To Cahal, Blantin's purpose was no mystery. Greed had brought his evil character into bright day. In this flat land of Goose Creek Valley, his railroad company employer could give him every odd-numbered section in any one township of his choice. Even-numbered sections would fall to him by various means, murder not excluded. In time he'd own thirty-six square miles, above twenty-three thousand acres. To Blantin, permitting a half-breed Sioux to hold four hundred eighty choice acres centering this future empire of his would amount to stupid absurdity. Blantin's gunmen were ready at hand. No doubt existed now in Cahal's mind; Blantin had deliberately chosen them to become his future killers.

As soon as he'd downed a hurried meal, Cahal strolled away from camp. This was not unusual for among those men, he'd been a lone wolf; his leaving caused no comment. They'd expect him to be absent for hours, he thought.

In this prairie country there was no twilight. Sundown was an hour gone, and night already was at its full dark. A few hundred yards from camp, Cahal swung back to Goose Creek, intending to shelter himself from sight under its trees, in case an assassin followed him. His destination was Goat's cabin.

Two sounds arrested his attention, first a splash in Goose Creek, then a distant wagon rumble. He crouched and listened. A bush stirred below him.

"Goat!" he called softly. "I am Goat's friend, pole man Cahal."

There was only a soft murmur of running water. "Spotted Goat, come up and talk to me. There's no need to be afraid; I am alone."

A dark form moved. "Good. Me Spotted Goat. Cahal my friend." He climbed up and squatted by Cahal. "What pole man want?"

Cahal could see him indistinctly. "Why do you have bow and arrow?"

"Arrow is silent. Kill from dark

night. Blantin bad medicine."

Cahal put a hand on his arm. "Listen, Goat. A wagon. Heading toward your cabin. Come; they mean to burn you out."

They could see no wagon. A sky full of stars gave beauty, but little light. Cahal and Goat were two miles from Goat's cabin.

"Me have horse," said Goat. "Carry two."

"Good. You lead; I follow."

Goat leaped down into Goose Creek, Cahal close behind. Just beyond, Goat's buckskin was hitched to a tree. Goat untied his hitch and leaped to his back. He gave Cahal a hand up.

But Goose Creek curved northward; their way round was long. When they were still a mile off, fire blazed up from Goat's cabin. They heard rifle fire.

Goat drew rein. "Great White Father give land to Spotted Goat. He say, 'Improve land.' Spotted Goat do that. Now paleface Blantin burn what Spotted Goat build. Land not improved then. Blantin take land from Spotted Goat. Law no good. Treaty no good. Spotted Goat use bow and arrow."

"If you kill Blantin," said Cahal, "then Great White Father will send soldiers to kill you. He will do that, because he will not understand why you kill paleface. You do as I say. You will keep land then, and Blantin will be punished."

"Paleface never punished. You get off horse. Me kill Blantin. Let Great White Father send soldiers; they not find Spotted Goat; they find only bones of paleface."

"Goat, I'm going with you. Ride on. We'll leave your horse at a distance and slip up on them. But not to kill them. I shall show you a better way. Where law is, there is Great White Father. Spotted Goat himself said so. We'll go to where there are men of law, who punish men like Blantin. You will see."

Goat grunted, but he was unconvinced. Yet he'd been impressed by cunning and power of white men. Had they not driven Indians from their hunting grounds, beaten them in battle, herded them onto reservations? And was he not part white man himself? Maybe, being half-breed Sioux, he could have a part in white man's law. He'd see. "Me go," he said.

THEY STOPPED a few hundred yards from Goat's cabin and crawled forward on their bellies. Blantin and his gunners were standing beyond them, watching Goat's cabin disintegrate in flames and flying sparks.

Cahal spoke low. "Look carefully, Goat. That big man is Blantin. On his right, Satterfield. To the left, Creed Oliver, then Gett Tharp. You are a witness, Goat. Someday you will be asked, 'How do you know those men burned your house?' And you will say, 'I saw them.' You can point your finger at them and say, 'Blantin, Oliver, Tharp, Satterfield; I saw them; I heard things they said.' Look good, and remember."

"Me not forget."

They heard Blantin saying, "If Goat was in there, he's burned to a crackling. If he wasn't in there, he'll know enough to pull out of this valley. Let's get back to camp."

Creed Oliver asked, "What about Cahal? He's a company pet, you know. He'll squawk to higher-ups."

Blantin's reply had meaning. "He won't squawk, if he's dead."

"That's what I was hoping you'd say, Blantin."

Cahal and Goat lay low until all was quiet and deserted, then they sat up.

"Cahal hear that?" said Goat. "Now you kill Blantin, huh?"

"No," said Cahal. "It would not be according to law. Great White Father has ways of punishing criminals. We go to lodge of Great White Father. Do you have half-breed friend somewhere who will look after your cattle and horses?"

"Me have cousin, Big Elk. Me have friends, Pelican, Strong Bear. We go to Strong Bear."

Strong Bear had scrip land ten miles up Goose Creek. They were there at daylight, with Goat's horses, wagon, and cattle. Strong Bear had a fat wife, three small sons, two daughters. He had Bright Star, a daughter near marrying age. She looked at Goat with adoring eyes. Goat looked at her more than once, pleased that possibly he would not have to wait much longer before asking for her as his bride.

Strong Bear promised to looked after Goat's property while Goat went on a long journey with Cahal.

A long journey it was, at least so thought Goat. Strong Bear took them on horseback to where they caught a work train going east. Their train passed hundreds of men and horses. It sped through little towns, crossed many miles of prairie, and came at last to a big town, where Cahal talked to men in high hats and black suits. Cahal fixed up important papers. One of those papers was a warrant, which he gave to a man called a marshal, who had horses and men put on a train going west. Days later those same men came back, bringing four handcuffed prisoners, Webb Blantin, Sloan Satterfield, Gettys Tharp and Creed Oliver.

Many days later Goat saw those prisoners tried before judge and jury on charges of arson and assault with intent to commit murder. Goat was a witness, as Cahal had said he'd be. Goat was present, too, when they were sentenced to prison. In a civil suit, Goat had a judgment against them for assault and battery and for burning his cabin. Cahal collected out of pay they had coming to them from their railroad company employer. Cahal also got an injunction against further trespass upon Goat's land until his permission was obtained, and for that permission he received pay in white man's money. Indeed, he got so much justice he was amazed at its abundance.

It was autumn when he returned with Cahal to Goose Creek Valley. Already a railroad crossed his land. Materials and carpenter's tools had been unloaded from a freight car, and again was Goat amazed to learn those materials were for him, lumber, doors, windows, bricks, paint for a new house to replace that which had been burned.

Strong Bear, Big Elk, Pelican, and other friends of Spotted Goat had come down to see and hear about all these wonders that had come to Spotted Goat. Goat spoke with much eloquence of what he had done and seen and heard.

"Well," said Cahal at last, "what do you think now of Great White Father?"

They saw smoke from a train coming over Prairie Dog Hill.

Goat lifted his right hand, palm eastward. "Train come. But train not come until Spotted Goat say it can. Spotted Goat thank friend Cahal for making law of Great White Father work like ought to. Cahal big medicine."

In Cahal's town, Goat had earned his living by helping build houses. He'd learned in school how to build. Now he'd learned still more. And he had money in his pockets.

"You will build your house right away, of course," said Cahal. "Before snow, and before Strong Bear gives Bright Star to some other half-breed Sioux."

Cahal had heard that Indians did not laugh. These half-breeds laughed. They pounded Goat's back in token of happy friendship.

Goat was embarrassed, but for only a moment. "Me build before snow." He turned slowly to survey his half-breed friends. "Me give jobs to half-breed Sioux. We build house right away." He gazed southward over his lovely flat. "But we build there, not here. Spotted Goat not like smoke of train. No like noise. Spotted Goat like big, clean land of Sioux forefathers."

★

Gun-Gate To Hell

"Miss Wilcox, I need a well, and I can't afford to drive one on my high land–but your park..." That was when the trouble began!

by Gene Austin

LAINE HELD the sorrel at the fork of the road while the three riders came up at a nonchalant trot and halted in a cloud of sharp alkali dust.

"Why'd you hail me?" he asked, studying the unlikable face of Ham Dunning sweating under a black sombrero.

Ham brought his dun in close. "Just thought I'd tell you that you might hang around your house today. You might get some visitors."

"Who?" Laine said, still looking him hard in the face. It was a silent and unmistakable way of telling Ham he could go to hell.

Ham shrugged. "Wait and find out. Just wanted to let you know."

"Thanks," Laine said. He brought the sorrel's head around and spurred it up the fork, not looking back but hearing the knot of punchers take off up the other fork.

He stared at the big spread-out mansion ahead, considered, and spat out his plug of chaw-tobacco. He was wearing his cleanest levis and his dress boots; it was important that Miss Laura Wilcox be not drawn away from his words by his appearance.

There was a little iron stable boy in the yard, such as Laine had once seen in Virginia, and he tied the sorrel to the boy's iron hand and advanced to the door. He clunked the knocker four times before a colored woman opened up and asked him his business.

"To see Miss Wilcox," he said with a little awe. 'John Laine, callin'."

The colored woman said to come in and he followed her to a big oak door which the woman held open. He walked in and there was Miss Wilcox at a little writing desk. The door closed behind him and he felt he must be flushing a little.

"It's about a well, Miss Wilcox," he said right out.

"Well? What have I to do with any well?"

Laine found it a little hard to explain because of her prettiness. She was without doubt the prettiest girl in town, not to mention the richest and most stuck-up. When she went to Bluebend she was always with the colored woman and she hardly spoke to anybody.

"Miss Wilcox," he said, "you got the lowest land anywhere near my ranch. It's south of the ranch—that grove, like, with all the posies in it, and it's at least forty feet lower than any of my own land. There's water under it, I'm sure, and I want your permission to dig a well there."

Miss Wilcox appeared to be thinking. She looked at him with extraordinary guileless blue eyes. Then a snap appeared in the blue. "Why, you must be talking of my park—with all the bluebells and columbine and paintbrush in it? Why, I spend my afternoons there almost every day."

"That's the place," Laine said. He had seen her there more than once. "You see, Miss Wilcox, I ain't got enough water above ground to last through the drought season—last year it almost wiped me out. This year it will, 'less I get a well.

"Now, I can't afford to sink a well on that high land of mine and build a big windmill like it would take, so I figured I'd rent that spot. Fill enough tanks in the wet weather to last me through the drought—"

MISS WILCOX got to her feet, no longer quite guileless. "Mr. Laine, how can you expect me to allow you to deface the spot I love best in the world, the only solace I have in this hellish country, so you can build a well and water those awful, ugly beasts—"

"Miss Wilcox!" Laine said coldly. "Maybe they're ugly to you, but they're my livin'."

"Well, they're not mine. Of course you can't build a well there. It's ridiculous. No."

Laine swore softly and it brought a thick red to Miss Wilcox's cheeks. He turned and headed for the door before he raised his voice or grabbed her or something, but he couldn't quite make it. He turned at the door and said angrily, What is your livin', Miss Wilcox? And if you think it's so hellish around here why don't you move?" Miss Wilcox turned quite pale. Laine snapped at her. "Maybe you don't think I know it, but your old man was the Mule Wilcox that hit the Snake bonanza. I knew him when he didn't have a dime and his only home was the calaboose."

She got so pale that he started to feel a little sorry for her, but kept on. "Maybe that's why you don't take your gold and go back east. They'd snub you off and you couldn't take that."

"Oh!" Miss Wilcox said.

Laine figured maybe he'd said enough. He let himself out of the room and out the front door and forked the sorrel before anyone could come after him. He'd gone about a quarter of a mile when he came to the park and halted there, looking at it regretfully.

It was shaped like an elipse, a sort of beautiful, big sink, so lush he could almost smell the water under it, that had been his only hope. There was no money available for expensive deep-well operations and no chance to get it. He rode on morosely to the boundaries of his own land, let himself through the fence and headed for the ranch house.

Fifty feet on he reined up sharply. A fat brown longhorn grazed by and struck and kept his attention. There was a plain HD burnt on its flank.

"Ham Dunning cow," he said aloud. "What's it doin' here?"

He inspected it carefully and rode a few circles in search of more of the same. He found no more, but his dejection was pierced now with alarm and he was puzzled. He had rode fence the day before and found no breaks;

he did not see how else it could have got there.

Then he remembered that it was Saturday and he had no time to waste. There was always a job for him on Saturday in Bluebell...

HE TIED in front of a one-floor, dirty building with a large sign on top which said: *Strong drink.* Down the street he recognized the horses of Ham Dunning and his two punchers tied at the sheriff's office.

He frowned, then pushed through the wing doors and entered the saloon. Lined up along the bar like birds in a shooting gallery were a string of HD punchers and a sprinkling of those from smaller ranches like his own. At a corner table, breaking into an off-key song, was Ted Wittle, who owned and ramrodded the little 4-S.

Laine tramped to the table and helped himself to a chair. "How many drinks you had, Ted?

Wittle scowled, then grinned. "Four large, John. Too many?"

"For you it's too many. Maybe you better finish up at home."

Wittle nodded. "Old hard-headed John's right as usual." He started to get up, then sank back in his chair, his face serious. "You think we got a chance, John?"

Laine couldn't work up much enthusiasm, thinking about that well and the HD cow and the horses in front of the sheriff's office. He built a smoke with extreme care.

"The townspeople are for us," he said. "They like the way we stay out of trouble and keep off the streets 'cept on business. They don't like the way the HD men raise hell and Sheriff Horden let's them get away with it. If the townspeople vote for our man we can get him in."

"Figurin' if he ain't Dunning's man he'll cut that trouble down, too," Wittle said, nodding. "Well, I'm glad we got you for a conscience, John. I reckon us small ranchers like our drink and fight as well as the next man, but we can't rub a son like you when you're proddin' us. I see some boys at the bar; maybe you better talk a little with them."

Wittle got up and ambled out; Laine sat smoking slowly. This morning the fight to install an honest sheriff had seemed a vital personal thing, now the edge was knocked off by the well disappointment. If he did not get that water he'd go under and even a sheriff who'd stand up and fight Ham Dunning's land-hungry tactics would be no help for him.

He smashed the cigarette and went over to the bar, talked softly to three flush-faced punchers who argued a little, then walked out. He felt a small satisfaction. If there was any trouble today, it would be by HD men.

He had a drink and thought about Miss Laura Wilcox. He had a powerful desire to bend her over his knee and bang away. And then he remembered Ham Dunning and the talk of visitors.

He hiked his Levis and found Ham Dunning, Sheriff Horden, and the two punchers pulling up outside the saloon. Ham, squinting against the sun, looked down at him. "Since you ain't at home, you can just ride out with us."

"You're the visitors," Laine said. "Ham, what's that cow of yours doin' on my land? You put it there?"

Ham snorted. "It's too late now, Laine." He swung to the sheriff. "He admitted it, Tom. You hear him?"

Horden nodded. "Looks like you're in trouble, Laine."

Laine did not look at the sheriff. "Maybe you ought to explain my trouble, Ham."

Dunning's eyes were flatly confident. "You been stealin' my cattle. I been missin' cows for over a month, some mavericks even. My boys found a cow this mornin' that you hadn't got around to doctorin' yet. Laine, we're goin' out and take those cattle back—and you better not get in the way."

"How many you figure I stole, Ham."

"At least fifty head. We'll take fifty."

LAINE SKINNED his lips back over his teeth and wanted to laugh. It was shallow and obvious, but it was the way Dunning wanted it. It was good enough.

Horden was looking at him angrily, thinking, maybe, of the fat bank account Dunning had made possible for him. "I ought to run him in."

Laine found his trembling hands working on another smoke. Ham Dunning didn't want him in jail. Ham wanted him to rise up at this injustice and try to stop the moving of the cattle. Then there would be a gun battle and somebody would be killed, probably himself. And he knew, without conceit, that without his steadying influence the small ranchers would not contain themselves. They'd make trouble and Dunning and Horden would stop it and let the townspeople, who wanted only peace, know it.

Then Dunning could ram Horden back into office and, with the law at his side, proceed to wipe out everything that Laine and Wittle and the rest had painfully tried to build. He had not thought Dunning so clever.

And the hell of it was he could see no reason to get himself shot up because Dunning was stealing fifty head of his cattle. Dunning could water them, at least.

Dunning said, "Well, we ain't got all day." He pulled away and the sheriff and two punchers followed.

Laine stood and watched them, and it started to rankle, like maybe Dunning knew it would. He swore at

Laura Wilcox for being a snob and unreasonable and at Dunning because he had him over a barrel and Laine couldn't stand to think of him fattening his damned gut on Laine cattle.

He thought about it till it tore at his belly and then he mounted the sorrel and started to follow.

Dunning had added a big strip of land just outside of town to his spread and they rode for half an hour on it before they hit Laine's ranch. It was set like a postage stamp in the middle of Dunning's property; between it and another Dunning leg was the estate of Miss Laura Wilcox, park and all.

Laine halted a hundred yards behind the men and the four held a short conference. Then one of the punchers dismounted and cut Laine's fence. All four rode through.

Laine pushed through a distance behind them; following, but not getting too close. The punchers began rounding up his cattle as they came to them, massing them along in a compact bunch, adding the best and fattest of Laine's stock.

Laine counted forty-eight as they neared the south fence, the border between his and Miss Wilcox's land. His heart was pounding hard and he drew his breath between set teeth. His palm itched for the hickory-handled Colt on his hip, but he was getting the spark of an idea.

He watched idly while the punchers picked up two more head and added them to the big bunch. He had drifted close enough to hear Dunning yell, "Drive them across the Wilcox land to the south range!" and look back at him.

The punchers cut a wide gap in his fence and moved into driving formation while the cattle lowed excitedly.

Laine figured he had waited long enough. He whipped out the Colt and fired three shots into the air, then spanged a bullet off the rump of the big steer that had fallen into the lead. The steer, snorted, reared, and took off through the gap into the Wilcox land, with the other frantic animals instantly following.

There wasn't much to Miss Wilcox's land. There was a slope and there was the dip down into the park. The head steer took the route it could navigate fastest; it plunged down the hill straight into the small park, plowing frantically through the bluebells and fireweed and with the remainder of the bear to look at all that beauty being trampled so unceremoniously; anyway he was busy shoving shells into his gun in the confusion and trying to keep in mind the positions of the HD men.

Dunning, he noted, had disappeared, swept along with the cattle, and was probably riding for his life through the park. The sheriff appeared thunderstruck, raised up in his stirrups gaping at the stampede.

LAINE SNAPPED a high shot at the punchers and rode into the wake of the stampede where the dust made him a poor target. On Miss Wilcox's land he dismounted and fell to one knee as the punchers charged after him.

He knocked one out of the saddle with a single bullet; the other reined up sharply, turned tail, and took off in the other direction. Then a bullet hit him in the back.

It knocked him flat. He rolled over, spitting dirt, and saw a hatless Ham Dunning, with his clothes half torn off, running at him and screaming at the top of his voice.

He took another bullet in the flesh of his shoulder, and he emptied his gun at the advancing form. Dunning kept coming and then fell in a heap ten feet away.

Laine sat up, but things were very dim. He saw Sheriff Horden kneeling beside Dunning and heard him say, "He's gone." Horden never had been much of a man for a fight.

Laine propped the empty gun on his knee and said softly, "Sheriff, I reckon if you want to retire on that bank account you ought to get your

story straight." He hoped Horden didn't look at the empty shell chambers. "With Dunning dead, the gravy-train's gone. You'll cotton to the small men till your term's up or they'll hang you eight feet high. You just tell the truth about this and you'll be all right."

"I'm an honest man," Horden said. "I'll tell the truth."

Laine almost believed him. Anyway, he'd tell the truth. "Then get back to town. If you see Wittle or any of them tell them to come out and help me get my cattle back."

Horden nodded and walked away, and Laine remained upright till he could no longer hear the beat of his horse. Then he passed out...

When he opened his eyes he perceived that his head was being supported by Miss Laura Wilcox. Moreover, she had recently been crying.

"Oh, you're alive! What happened? Why are all these dead men—"

"Well, Ham Dunning tried to steal my cattle and he driv them right through your park. I reckon it's ruined?"

"It's awful. It's all torn to pieces."

"Well, it's good for a well."

Her eyes narrowed but she caught herself quickly. "All right, you can build your well. It's certainly no good to me anymore."

Laine leaned back against her strong hand. He thought about how nice it would be with Dunning out of the way and a square law in Bluebend. A man could move and live like a man ought to. He looked at her sharply. "You know, if you weren't so blamed rich I might ask you to marry me."

Her eyes went wide. "I'm not as rich as you think. Mule Wilcox's bonanza's just about played out."

"Well, I oughtn't to hold that against you anyway," he said carefully. Now, if she'd just bend down and kiss him. It took a long time for her to do it, but he liked it when she did.

★

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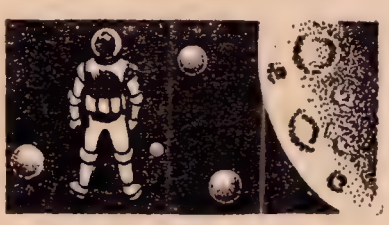

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Know Your West

(continued from page 8)

ror in this story? (You'll find the answer on page 96)

●

THE DEVIL GUN

ALL DAY long you could hear the hammers rattle on the wagon-tires and horseshoes; the men laughed as they went about their preparations. Then, one by one, the wagons fell into line. Each was drawn by six or eight horses, mules, or oxen. Mr. William Henderson, leader of the wagon-train, turned to Captain John Gunther, of the Confederate States of America.

"I would feel much better if we had more soldiers with us. But just the same, I do appreciate the fact that President Jefferson Davis has sent you and the four soldiers to accompany us."

"You are citizens of Her Majesty's Government," replied the captain; "and we are at peace with Great Britain. According to our agreement we are to stay with you until, under a flag of truce, we meet Major Wilton of the United States Army. We must go through territory occupied by hostile Indians and guerrillas, who would cut anyone's throat for booty."

For six days the wagon train moved northward. At night the wagons, with tongues outward, were pulled together in a vast circle and chained together—front wheels to rear—to form a protective corral. Inside, the animals were free to wander and graze as they pleased. Yet there was a peculiar feeling of pessimism among most of the men.

"I got it deep down in my bones that eyes are watching every move we make," said Hank Jepser to Mr. Henderson. "I agreed to act as guide for this here wagon-train, even though there is a war taking place. It's goin' to be tough if we have to fight Apaches. And just as bad if we have to fight Joe Dean and his guerrillas."

JOE DEAN was waiting for the return of two of his trusted men, Pete Marglin and Herb Swayne. He had sent them out to purchase revolver-caps. On hand he had lead and powder, but without those caps his revolvers were useless. They returned late in the afternoon with the good news that the mission had been successful; he assembled all of his men and told them about his plans.

"There's a wagon-train that started from the Rio Grande; got a load of English people in it. All I know is that a fellow called Henderson has with him three million dollars in negotiable English bonds. We can wipe out that wagon-train, with every man, woman and child in it, by using our revolver technique. Get ready, men."

Herb Swayne would follow his leader into the jaws of death. It meant little to him whether he found Union men one day, Southerners the next, and neutral the third. But he had a healthy respect for the redman. "Suppose we run into Apaches. What do we do?"

Joe Dean wasn't angry at that question; he just laughed and gave a sensible answer. "Then we ride like blazes away from them."

●

Chief Long Hair had followed every move of that wagon-train; and now, as they were camped below, he figured

out his plan of attack. There would be fire-arrows to burn the wagons; then a quick charge, and it would be all over. Suddenly one of the braves near him on the top of the hill pointed to a cloud of dust to the west.

"Men riding towards wagon-train. They have setting sun with them. We wait?"

•

On every expedition and fight, Joe Dean had used his revolver-technique perfectly. Each of his men carried two guns in holsters around their hips; two more revolvers were carried in saddle holsters. No need to waste precious time reloading. The fire-power of each man at close quarters were murderous; they charged the wagon-train, certain of success, as they started firing.

Captain John Gunther gave a command to the soldier seated next to him in their wagon. "Drop the canvas and begin firing our machine-gun. That ought to give those raiders a surprise."

With deadly accuracy the Williams Smooth Bore Machine Gun, Cal. 1.56 mowed down the raiders; Joe Dean and most of his men never knew what hit them. Its extreme range was 2,000 yards, and it was most reliable; the raid was over almost before it began.

"They must have been after the bonds I am carrying," said Mr. William Henderson. "I am deeply indebted to your government for sparing one of those precious guns to protect us."

Chief Long Hair uttered a silent prayer to the Great Spirit who lived in the clouds. And then he uttered a simple philosophic thought.

•

"Many Indians have died so that the white man might live; but now white men die so that the Indian might

[*Turn Page*]

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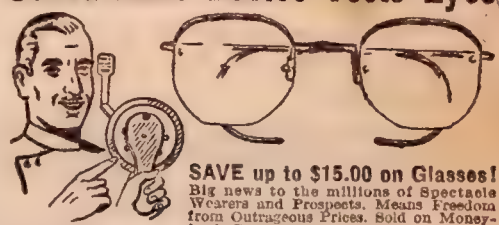

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live. We ride away and warn all other brothers not to go near wagon-train with devil-gun."

Question: Can you spot the big error in this story? (You'll find the answer on page 98)

●

THE COP CAPTURES CENTERVILLE

FRANK HARRIS was not the type of man to conceal his troubles. One look at his face and his wife, Martha, could see he was heading for stomach-trouble.

"Gracious me," she complained at the supper table, "the way you eat food is enough to give a man a good dose of indigestion. What's troublin' you? You wanted to be mayor of Centerville—and you aren't happy over it."

"In another week, the cattle from the trail will be right in town and then down to the pens. Centerville is mighty important being the terminus of the T.R&D R. R. But with those wild characters coming into town I can see a lot of shooting and killings are going to take place."

"I don't want to tell you how to run this town," snapped back Mrs. Harris. "But if I were you then I would make Jim Kendy a U. S. Marshal. He ought to be able to keep law and order; he was a police officer in New York, and everyone knows that town is a hotbed of sin. He's the man for you."

Jim Kendy was a tall and powerful man. In his holster he carried a special forty-five caliber six gun of regulation single-action style, but with a barrel four inches longer than standard size.

"Ned Buntline gave it to me when I came west," he would tell inquisitive people. "It has a demountable walnut rifle stock. Ned also gave them to Wyatt Earp, Charlie Basset and Bat Masterson."

[*Turn To Page* 90]

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In the mayor's office, Jim Kendy came right to the point and he certainly was clear in his demands.

"I want a salary of five hundred dollars a month, and in gold. You can pay it to me out of your own pocket; you own most of this town. For every man I take to jail I get a bonus of ten dollars. You got a dead ordinance on the books against carrying guns in this town; I want to enforce it. And Old Man Jenkins is going to be my sidekick; he gets two hundred a month. If you like those terms, swear me in and give me that badge."

By the next afternoon the entire town knew they had a most unusual distinction. A New York cop had become a U. S. Marshal and was going to enforce law and order.

JIM KENDY was in the *Big Star Saloon* when trouble—in the persons of Lou Simpson, Dave Rutledge, and Mike Verano—walked in. Each were wearing artillery.

Jim walked up to Lou Simpson. "You and your two friends can check your guns in my office. We have a law on the books against going around in this town armed, unless you represent the law. Am I clear?"

Lou was standing about half a foot from Jim and he went for his Colt. Jim stepped on Lou's right foot and smacked him straight in the jaw. He spun him around so that his own body was protected by Lou's body. And he held in his own hand the sixgun that had been in the bad man's holster.

"If you fellows start shooting," he warned, "you'll kill your friend right here. Drop your gun-belts to the floor."

The order was obeyed, much to the amazement of the onlookers who had expected something of a massacre. Then Jim spoke to Old Man Jenkins, who had been at the other side of the bar. "Take them to the jail and enter thirty dollars to our account on the books."

[*Turn To Page* 92]

"How I Became A Hotel Hostess"

Sara O'Farrell, Buyer Becomes Hostess-Housekeeper of Famous Hotel Without Hotel Experience

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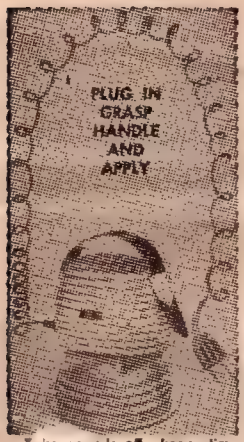

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FREE BOOK

THE NEXT evening Jim was sitting at a table sampling some of the liquid refreshments when in walked Steve Simpson, Lou's brother. He was followed by Pete Davidson. Steve held a double barrelled shotgun in his hand and was standing ten feet from Jim. "No cheap New York cop with a tin badge on his vest is going to put my brother in jail and live."

Steve fired and Jim jumped to the side of the chair. He didn't go for the Buntline special in his holster. In his right sleeve was a vestpocket .41 repeater which slid down into his hand and he fired a shot that hit Steve's forehead. The second shot went through Pete's heart. There were two dead men on the floor.

"I get cheated out of twenty dollars because they wanted to kill me," was his only complaint. Then he moved to another table and continued his sampling of things that came in a bottle.

●

News travels far and wide and when the trail boys hit the town they already had heard of the terrible reputation of the cop who had cleaned up Centerville. His technique with drunks was simple; he took out his Buntline special, smacked them on the head and then gave a simple order to Old Man Jenkins. "Enter ten more dollars on the book to our account."

But life was no longer a gamble in the town, and every man checked his sixgun in the office. Then Tom Harrison, boss of the famous H spread, walked into the saloon followed by a group of his men. They were all armed.

"We have a law," began Jim and he got no further. Nine six shooters and two rifles were levelled against him. Tom took Jim's gun from the holster and held it against the marshal's heart. "Let me see you pray before I kill you," was the order.

"Bet you could use a man like me

[*Turn To Page 94*]

DRUNK?

Jeopardizing HAPPINESS, HEALTH, and INCOME? Relief may be obtained economically and quickly with U.M.R. ORIGINAL HOME METHOD. MAY BE USED SECRETLY! Used by leading alcoholic institutions to help BUILD AVERSION AND ELIMINATE DESIRE FOR ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES, now available to you. Has helped bring relief to many drinkers as a method of temporary ALCOHOL WITHDRAWAL and by BREAKING DRINKING CYCLE. Not a remedy for underlying personality maladjustment causing alcoholic excesses. DOES NOT FOR ANY PROLONGED PERIOD, INTERFERE WITH WORK FOR SOCIAL LIFE. One of many satisfied users writes: "Your method is wonderful! Am very happy over it!"—Mrs. M. D. S., Ill. Prepared by pharmacist formerly connected with leading alcoholic sanitarium. Comes in plain wrapper. READY TO USE, complete with instructions. WHY PAY MORE FOR IMITATIONS? ORDER ORIGINAL U.M.R. METHOD TODAY AND SAVE!

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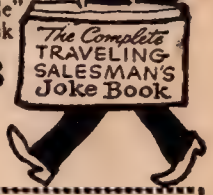

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down on your ranch," was the simple reply. "If you pull the trigger of that gun, you'll kill yourself; I rigged it up so it would explode. I never shot it, but I figured some day a fool would do what you want to do."

There was a deadly silence in the saloon while Tom decided what to do. He returned the gun to Jim with an offer. "Join me and I'll double your salary, and give you a small interest in my ranch."

•

It was a year later, when they had become close friends, that Jim said to Tom. "That really was a trick gun—in the sense I never kept it loaded. I figured on using the two derringers I had in each sleeve for fighting."

Question: Can you spot the big error in this story? (You'll find the answer on page 98)

★

A BIT OF WESTERN SHOOTING

[*Continued From Page* 70]

had gone off to "heel himself," and there would soon be trouble.

The big man was not alarmed.

"Why, gentlemen," said he, "you don't know me! — you don't know who I am! I'm the Wild Boar of Tehama! The click of a sixshooter is music to my ear, and a bowie-knife is my looking-glass—" He happened to look toward the door and saw the miner entering with a shotgun. He said: "But a shotgun lets me out!" and he went through the window behind him, head-first.

★

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by A. A. Baker

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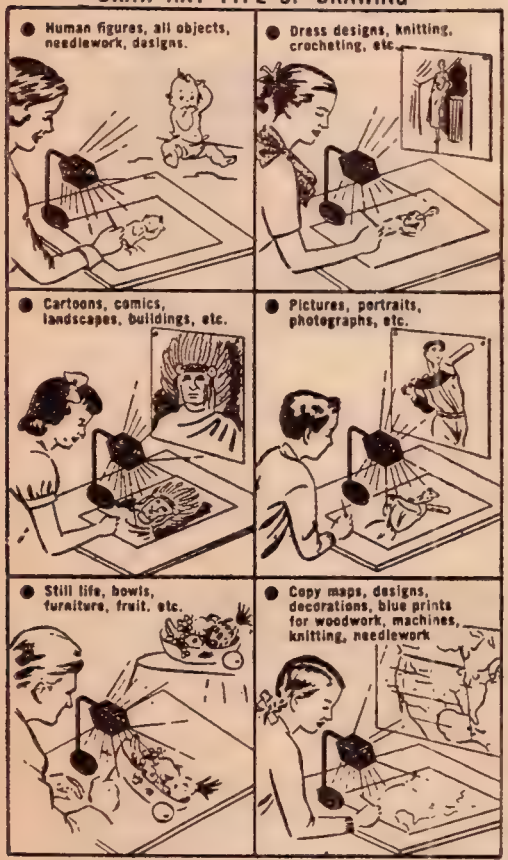
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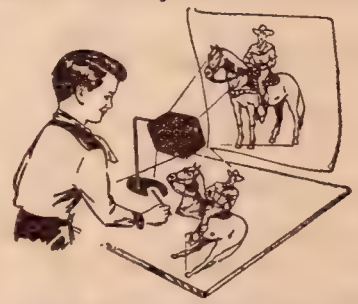

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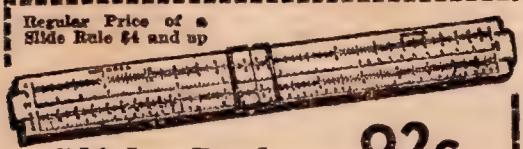

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ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ STORIES "Know Your West"

THE SHOT THAT MISSED

Those Kutchins don't belong in the U.S. As for that 20 shot revolver, it is o. k. It existed.

References: 1. "Nomads of the Far North" by Matthew W. Stirling in the *National Geographic Magazine* for October, 1949. See page 473 for Kutchin territory.

2. "Triggernometry—A Gallery of Gunfighters" by Eugene Cunningham. The Caxton Printers, Ltd. Caldwell, Idaho. 1947. See pages 427-8 for gun belt with gun sliding in slot.

3. "Antique Firearms and Edged Weapons." Catalog No. 28. Robert Abels. See page 48 for that 20 shot revolver.

4. "Jeff Milton, A good Man with

[*Turn To Page* 98]

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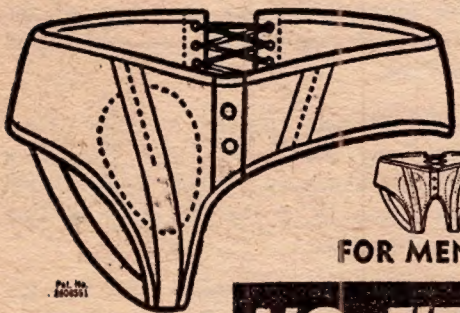

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A Gun." by J. Evetts Haley. University of Oklahoma Press. 1948. See page 158 for throwing silver dollars into air and shooting them.

5. "My Life on the Frontier—1864-1882" by Miguel Antonio Otero. The Press of the Pioneers, Inc. 1935. New York. See page 121 for that hat stunt to get drop on the other fellow.

●

THE DEVIL GUN

If you kept livestock inside a wagon-corral, you would stake down the animals and not let them go free. What an opportunity for a redskin to sneak through and start trouble. As for that machine-gun, it's true stuff.

References: 1. "Rio Grande" by Harvey Fergusson. Tudor Publishing Co. New York. 1945. See page 164 for description of wagon-train.

2. "The '49ers" by Evelyn Wells and Harry C. Peterson. Doubleday And Co. Garden City, N.Y. 1949. See page 37 for description of wagon-train at rest.

3. "A True Story of Charles W. Quantrell And His Guerrilla Band." by J. P. Burch. (As told by Captain Harrison Trow) 1923, Vega, Texas. See this unusual book for a complete descripton of Guerrilla tactics.

4. "The Machine-Gun." Vol. 1. United States Navy Bureau of Ordinance. 1951. See page 42 for description and picture of that machine-gun.

●

THE COP CAPTURES CENTERVILLE

The mayor of a town can't appoint a U.S. Marhsal; that's a Federal appointment. The story about the cop who went west is straight stuff.

References: 1. "Texas, An Informal Biography," by Owen P. White. G. P. Putnam's Sons. New York, 1945. See pages 157-8 for the story of the New York cop who became marshal of Abilene.

2. "Wyatt Earp, Frontier Marshal," by Stuart N. Lake. Houghton Mifflin Company. New York, 1950. See pages 145-6 for the story of that Buntline gun.

3. "The Peacemaker and Its Rivals," by John E. Parsons. William Morrow & Company. New York, 1950. See page 48 for a picture of that Buntline gun.

4. "Famous Sheriffs & Western Outlaws," by William MacLeod Raine. The New Home Library. New York, 1944. See page 9 for that shotgun shooting affair.

5. "Remington Handguns," by Charles Lee Karr, Jr. and Caroll Robbins Karr. The Stackpole Company. Harrisburg, Pa. 1947. See page 64 for that .41 derringer.

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